

GODS AND SETTLERS

STUDIES IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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VOLUME 25

GODS AND SETTLERS

The Iconography of Norse Mythology
in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture

By

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For Benjamin and Finn

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INTRODUCTION

The Riddle of the Gosforth Lady

The battle rages: read we the story and its parallels on the eastern plane of this wonderful cross [of Gosforth] — a churchyard picture-Bible at once to the Pagan and to the Christian. (Calverley 1899: 153)

These were the words of Rev. William Slater Calverley, the vicar of Aspatria and a devoted antiquarian, describing an ancient cross in the churchyard of St Mary's in the Cumbrian village of Gosforth (Figure 1). His fascination and remarks were sparked by the unusual iconography of the monument: images of a raging battle and fierce monsters on a Christian cross, and perhaps most strangely a small Crucifixion scene on the 'eastern plane' that included Christ, a soldier with a



Figure 1. Viking-Age stone cross in the churchyard of St Mary's, Gosforth, Cumbria.

Photo: Lilla Kopár.



Figure 2. Image of the Crucifixion on the Gosforth cross (no. 1C, east, detail), Cumbria. First half of tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

spear, and a Scandinavian-style woman with long braided hair and a trailing dress proffering a drinking vessel (Figure 2). Who was this female figure and what was she doing in the Crucifixion scene?

The Gosforth Crucifixion carving, which has generated much scholarship since Calverley's remarks, is familiar and yet peculiar at the same time. It shows Christ grasping a rectangular frame; he is in a cruciform posture but without a cross. Below the frame are two facing figures: a man whose spear extends into the frame above (left) and facing him the Scandinavian-style woman with the vessel (right). The presence of the two attendant figures suggests a common three-figure Crucifixion iconography, but the attendant figures are unusual. Three-figure Crucifixion images traditionally depict St John and the Virgin Mary on the side of the crucified Christ. Alternatively, or in extended Crucifixion representations, he is accompanied by the figures of the lance-bearer and the sponge-bearer, Longinus and Stephaton. In addition to the Virgin Mary, further female figures may also be present: either Mary Magdalene or, frequently in Carolingian representations, the allegorical figures of Ecclesia and Synagoga (Kirschbaum 1968–72: II, 620–22). In the image on the Gosforth cross, Longinus can clearly be identified by his lance and by his gesture of piercing Christ's side, but he is accompanied not by Stephaton but by a female figure, which deviates from the tradition. Knut Berg (1958: 31) interpreted the latter

figure as Ecclesia with a chalice, but then she should be standing on Christ's right to catch his blood (a Eucharistic reference). Richard Bailey (1980: 130; Bailey and Cramp 1988: 102) suggested that she was Mary Magdalene holding an alabastron, a container of oil or ointment (her common attribute), in which case both attendant figures would represent converted heathens according to the tradition. The latter interpretation, though without parallels in contemporary insular art, offers a potential connection with the cultural-historical reality of the monument in a period of religious conversion of the Scandinavian settlers. The layout and the larger iconographical context of the monument reveal further peculiarities of the Gosforth lady that point towards different aspects of the same cultural context.

The female figure, together with the lance-bearer, is visually separated from the crucified Christ by being excluded from the Crucifixion frame. This implies a twofold division of the scene that gives more prominence to the attendant figures than usual. The lack of panelling on the cross in general opens up the way for the viewer to make his or her own distinctions and associations (Bailey 1996a: 87). The style and gesture of the female figure certainly evoked associations outside of the scope of Christian lore among the contemporary audience of the monument. This original audience was necessarily familiar enough with Scandinavian culture to recognize the rest of the imagery on the cross: a depiction of Ragnarök, the apocalypse of Norse mythology. (For a discussion of the iconography of the whole monument see Chapter 2 below).

The trailing dress, the braided hair, and the gesture of a female figure proffering a drink recall numerous Viking-period Scandinavian depictions in metalwork and stone carvings, generally interpreted (on the basis of literary evidence) as valkyries welcoming Odin or warriors in Valhalla.¹ Considering the common depiction in insular art of a victorious Christ on the cross and his rendering in heroic terms in Anglo-Saxon poetry, it does not seem that surprising to have a 'valkyrie' receiving 'the victorious warrior' into the realm of death. The spear, which connects the two parts of the carving, gains additional significance in this context. The image captures a particular moment of the Crucifixion narrative when Christ is pierced by the spear of a soldier (John 19. 34).² As Jens Peter Schjødt has pointed out

¹ See, for example, carvings on picture stones from Gotland (at Halla Broa, Nar Bosarve, Stenkyrka Lillbjärs III, Alskog Tjängvide I, and Lärbro St Hammars) and small metal figurines (pendants and gold foil figures) from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. For illustrations, see Linquist 1941–42; Roesdahl and Wilson 1992: cat. nos 175, 186, 281; Lindow 2002: 96, 276. For further discussion of valkyries and related sculptural evidence from England, see Chapter 3.

² It was the act of piercing that marked Christ as the true Saviour by fulfilling the scripture:

in connection with dedication rituals and the cult of Odin, the key to entering Valhalla (an act of heroic recognition) was not necessarily or exclusively an honourable death in battle, but rather having been initiated into the cult of Odin, traditionally through dedication by spear, which commemorated the ritual death of Odin on the cosmic tree Yggdrasil (2007: 148). The parallels between the sacrifices of Odin and Christ are hard to miss: both are hung on the world tree in self-sacrifice, pierced by a spear, with no drink offered (cf. *Poetic Edda*, *Hávamál* 138–39). In spite of these tempting parallels, I am *not* suggesting that the Gosforth image depicts Odin or an Odinic sacrifice. What I do propose is that the lower section of the Crucifixion carving recalls traditional images of a Norse/Germanic heroic moment, which is connected to the central moment of Christian history — by a visual hint and a series of associations. These associations may also extend in another direction: in Chapter 2, together with a detailed discussion of the iconography of the whole monument, a further suggestion will be put forward for the identity of the female figure as a personification of death and mortality based on the figure of Hel, the Norse goddess of the underworld. This interpretation is also rooted in the emphasis on the moment of death as captured in the Crucifixion image and is supported by the substitution of a Scandinavian-style drink-bearing woman in place of the traditional sponge-bearer, who offered a drink to Christ.

The Gosforth carver's alteration of the Crucifixion image shows that he was equally familiar with both Christian and pagan Scandinavian artistic traditions which he freely and fruitfully amalgamated. He deliberately modified the traditional Crucifixion image and inserted a female attendant figure of Scandinavian artistic fashion. Through this modification the well-known Christian scene became enriched or 'footnoted' by a further subtext (or rather a whole group of related narratives depicted on all four sides of the cross). The image came to serve as a link between the Christian narrative and the rest of the carvings on the cross by simultaneously referencing both iconographical and cultural traditions.³

'They will look on the one they have pierced' (John 19. 37; Zechariah 12. 10). According to the canonical biblical account of the piercing of Christ (John 19. 31–37), Christ did not actually die from the spear but was already dead when the Roman centurion pierced his side. The apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, on the other hand, which also uniquely records the name of the centurion, states that Longinus speared Christ before his death (cf. the piercing by Longinus in Nicodemus 7. 8; Christ's death in Nicodemus 8. 4). Both accounts record the highly dramatic moment of blood and water pouring out of Christ's side, which made this the most apt scene to capture his death in visual terms.

³ Thomas Ohlgren (1987: 50) argued that the image is an example of a creative cognitive

Consequently, the image is not about one story or the other any more, but it is about both narratives at the same time, the interplay of these narratives, their distinctiveness *and* oneness.

It is this distinctiveness and oneness that seems to characterize the culture of the first few generations after the Scandinavian settlement in the northern areas of England. The Crucifixion image (and the entire iconographical programme) of the Gosforth cross illustrates a fascinating process of cultural exchange and integration that took place in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities and manifested itself in their artistic production, particularly in stone carvings. It may thus serve as a 'visual motto' for the present study of an intercultural dialogue recorded in the stone sculptures of Viking-Age northern England. The Gosforth cross is just one example of several monuments utilizing Norse mythological or heroic references (to varying degrees), although probably the most intriguing one. In the following pages I will offer a detailed survey of all monuments with similar iconography, mostly on a much smaller scale, from Viking-Age northern England and examine the cultural and intellectual context of the creation and reception of these sculptures. Thereby I hope to add a new perspective to our understanding of these carvings by reading them as cultural documents of an intellectual process instead of being solely regarded as objects of art historical or archaeological interest.

The Study of Pre-Conquest Sculpture

As the opening quote by Rev. Calverley has indicated, Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture attracted the attention of local antiquaries from early on. This antiquarian and later wider scholarly interest in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in careful documentation and fine interpretation of single monuments, as well as in systematic regional surveys of the pre-Conquest material. Calverley's catalogue (1899) of the stone monuments of Cumberland and Westmorland was in fact one of the first surveys of northern English sculpture (edited after the author's death by W. G. Collingwood). Philip M. C. Kermode's impressive catalogue of the Manx corpus, with many important Scandinavian figural carvings, appeared in 1907. It was illustrated with fine (although sometimes a little wishful) drawings and set high standards for future scholars. The first comprehensive survey of the northern English material was accomplished by William G. Collingwood (the

process called Janusian thinking, where antithetical ideas and images (here the images of Odin and Christ) are operating side by side.

editor of Calverley's catalogue), whose *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* was published in 1927. Besides carefully documenting and cataloguing the surviving material, he offered valuable insights into the iconography of the carvings and suggested a chronology based on stylistic sequence. A chronology of Yorkshire sculpture, the largest group among Viking-Age monuments, had been proposed earlier by Johannes Brøndsted in 1924.

With the rediscovery of and scholarly interest in Germanic mythology in the nineteenth century, local antiquarians turned their attention to those carvings that depicted mythological scenes and characters alongside Christian iconography. A connection between these scenes had soon been suggested, and a number of insightful, but sometimes too creative, interpretations had been put forward. The most enthusiastic supporter of pagan-Christian parallels was the philologist George Stephens of Copenhagen. A fierce opponent of Stephens and his so-called 'Scandinavian school' was archaeologist J. Romilly Allen, an expert in early Christian monuments of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, who rejected the possibility that 'heathen legends were ever adapted to Christian purposes' (Allen 1886: 334, cited in Bailey 1980: 101). Since then, the relationship of 'heathen' and Christian iconographical elements has been re-examined by a number of scholars (Richard Bailey, James Lang, David Wilson, Sue Margeson, Otto Gschwantler, Klaus Düwel, David Stocker, and others) and constitutes the main focus of the present study as well.

Valuable summaries of the surviving pre-Conquest sculptural material, including Viking-Age carvings, have also been included in all major surveys of early medieval English art and architecture (e.g. Saunders 1932; Brown 1937; Kendrick 1938 and 1949; Rice 1952; Stone 1955; Jackson 1964; Dodwell 1982; Wilson 1984; Backhouse, Turner, and Webster 1984). They treated the monuments primarily from an art historical point of view, described their stylistic development and iconography, and established a chronology of the carvings.

A number of new archaeological discoveries since 1927, the date of Collingwood's catalogue, significantly increased the known corpus of pre-Conquest carvings in northern England as well as our knowledge about the monuments. In response to the scholarly needs evoked by the growing corpus of Anglo-Saxon stone carvings, a major cataloguing project and publication series was started at Durham University under the general leadership of Rosemary J. Cramp. The first volume of the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* was published in 1984.⁴ The Corpus project has inspired new kinds of inquiries and generated

⁴ The nine volumes published so far under various editors systematically cover the sculptural material of the counties of Durham and Northumberland (vol. 1), Cumberland, Westmorland,

increased interest in the study and preservation of pre-Conquest sculpture while providing an indispensable research tool for scholars. It has also served as a starting point for this project and will be referenced throughout the book.

In the past decades, the study of pre-Conquest stone sculpture has undergone some changes. A modern scholarly interest in the monuments focusing on style, artistic influences, and local groups was initiated in the 1970s most notably by Rosemary Cramp, James Lang, Richard Bailey, Christopher Morris, David M. Wilson, Gwenda Adcock, and Ian Pattison. They mapped out local 'schools' or workshops, identified particular masters based on the use of motifs, templates, and carving techniques, and refined dating. The growing number of scholarly publications on various aspects of stone carvings and sculptural production bears witness to a continued interest in Anglo-Saxon sculpture. Recent works by Elizabeth Coatsworth, Jane Hawkes, Catherine Karkov, Sue Margeson, John McKinnell, Éamonn Ó Carragáin, Fred Orton, Victoria Thompson, and others have presented new perspectives on the iconography, visual and textual origins and parallels, and liturgical and patristic sources of sculpted monuments (both pre-Viking and Viking-Age), as well as on questions of patronage, audience, and function.

Although the Viking-Age material had often been incorporated into art historical surveys, it was Richard Bailey's 1980 monograph titled *Viking Age Sculpture* that called special attention to this particular group of monuments. Since the publication of Bailey's study thirty years ago, there has been a growing interest in the conversion, cultural assimilation, and identity formation of the Vikings in England, and in the development and character of the Anglo-Scandinavian settlements. The study of stone sculpture has contributed significantly to our understanding of the Viking period in England. Several recent works have focused on sculptures as historical documents, examining the political, social, and cultural context of sculptural production and the communities in and for which these monuments were created (e.g. publications by Lesley Abrams, John Blair, Paul Everson, Dawn Hadley, Christopher Morris, Julian Richards, Phil Sidebottom, and David Stocker). The aim of the present study is to extend this line of scholarship by a new perspective and examine a particular group of carvings as cultural documents of an intellectual, rather than a historical or social, process.

and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands (vol. II), York and Eastern Yorkshire (vol. III), South-East England (vol. IV), Lincolnshire (vol. V), Northern Yorkshire (vol. VI), South-West England (vol. VII), Western Yorkshire (vol. VIII), and Cheshire and Lancashire (vol. IX), with six further volumes in preparation. See Cramp 1984–.

Sculptures as Cultural Documents

In historical studies on the Vikings in England, stone sculpture has often been used to map areas of Scandinavian settlement and political influence and to demonstrate the presence of Scandinavian cultural traditions in those territories. In both cases the focus has been on distinguishing the new settlers from the native Anglo-Saxons by separating traits of the two cultures. No doubt, the carvings that are to be discussed below well serve these kinds of inquiries, since they clearly demonstrate the impact of a non-Christian narrative and pictorial tradition introduced by the Vikings as well as the presence of an audience with an artistic taste of Scandinavian origin. However, these sculptures also provide evidence for another aspect of historical reality: they bear witness to the process of religious and cultural adaptation and assimilation that was initiated by the settlement of the Scandinavians. Therefore, instead of — or rather in addition to — being witnesses of the *intrusion* of the Northmen, they are witnesses of their *integration* into the native population (Similarly Bailey 1996a: 84; Hadley 2000: 315). This integration was a political necessity and was facilitated by cultural convergence, which, in terms of religion, meant the gradual Christianization of the new settlers.

The study of the conversion and assimilation of the Scandinavian settlers in England has so far concentrated mainly on the circumstances and outcome of these processes, that is, on the political, social, institutional, and economic background, on chronology, and on the influence on various aspects of English culture. However, conversion, Christianization, and cultural integration are processes that also contain a strong intellectual component. The aim of the present study is to re-examine the Viking-Age sculptural material as a creative manifestation of religious and cultural integration and to uncover traits of this intellectual process.⁵

⁵ It is important to emphasize that the focus of the present study is on the creative outcome, or artistic manifestation, of the conversion process in the visual arts, as opposed to the mental or cognitive processes of religious conversion, which is the primary concern of psychological and cognitive studies of conversion (e.g. Newton and Southard 1992: esp. 147–77; Ullman 1989; Rambo 1995; and many others). My particular approach has developed primarily from my interest in the study of iconography and literature and the interpretative methods of those fields, aided by an understanding of the specific historical context of Viking-Age England. It is in this sense that conversion is treated as an intellectual (vs. psychological, behavioural, mental, or cognitive) process.

The best term to describe the intellectual process documented by the stone carvings is 'religious accommodation'. In the course of religious accommodation, elements of one narrative tradition become integrated, or accommodated, in the intellectual framework of a dominant world view, while the receptive system of thought remains the dominant one. In this case the dominant system of thought is Christianity, and the source of the accommodated material is the mythological and heroic narrative traditions of the immigrant Scandinavians. The motivation behind the accommodation process was twofold. On the one hand, it promoted the understanding of the new cultural context and religion, while providing some continuity of the native cultural tradition; on the other, it satisfied specific socio-political needs (establishment of power, statement of cultural affiliation, and the promotion of certain social values).

Religious accommodation as intellectual process is characterized by an interest in and affinity for the interplay and overlap of various stories and their visual representations, as illustrated above on the example of the Gosforth cross. As will be demonstrated, the integration of 'pagan' (non-Christian) elements in the Christian iconographical context of some of the monuments to be discussed in this study reflects a particular way of thinking which facilitated the integration process. This thinking is based on an interest in shared patterns as links between narratives ranging from recurring objects or natural phenomena to similar characters, shared ethical concepts, and narrative structures. This 'figurative thinking'⁶ largely disregards causality and a linear concept of time, and in this it recalls one of the most popular biblical interpretative strategies of the Middle Ages, typology. Similarly to biblical typology, figurative thinking is also based on the unity of time and the interplay of past, present, and future. In the process of religious accommodation, the Christian salvation story becomes the core narrative in which other narratives of different cultural origins participate by their shared patterns. As opposed to biblical typology, however, in our case the so-called 'anti-type' does not fulfil the type, but it is rather illustrated or exemplified by it. It is a process of enrichment, a special way of explanation, but not biblical exegesis in the traditional sense. It is brought about by religious diversity and promotes primarily the understanding of a new cultural situation.

⁶ 'Figurative' or 'figural' thinking and interpretation have long been part of the nomenclature of medieval studies, heavily influenced by Erich Auerbach's use of the terms 'figura' and 'figural' (i.e. typological) interpretation in his seminal essay of 1938 (see also Auerbach 1984 for the English translation). For a detailed discussion of Auerbach's understanding of figural interpretation and its relation to my use of the term 'figurative thinking', see Chapter 5.

Methodological Concerns

Dealing with artefacts with pictorial representations, it is the methodological apparatus of iconography and iconology that seems most appropriate in first approaching these carvings. The study of iconography deals with the identification of culture-specific visual representations with the aim of understanding the content and meaning of a certain representation and of tracing its visual and textual sources. The objects of the study of iconography are artefacts with an intended textual referentiality, which presupposes a close relationship between the image and a 'text' that exists independently of the visual representation, but not necessarily in written form. Of course, we are working with a very broad definition of 'text' here that includes codified written texts, like the Bible, oral narratives in various versions, like mythological stories, and even specific cultural and social practices manifested, for example, in rites and rituals. While in Christian iconography the textual background is relatively easy to define (Christianity has a strong tendency to codify texts), in visual representations of primarily oral cultures the underlying 'texts' are rather fluid. They include written versions that are accessible for us today but also a much larger, often hypothetical, body of unrecorded oral versions (and now lost written sources) that the artists and audiences of surviving pictorial representations may have been familiar with.⁷

In the case of Viking-Age carvings with mythological, heroic, and sometimes even Christian iconography, the relationship between image and text is often not a one-to-one relationship but, as we have seen above in the Gosforth Crucifixion carving, a constant interplay of two or more 'texts' (here the biblical story of the Crucifixion and the Norse cultural concept of death and the welcoming of the dead in the otherworld, in addition to a correspondence between the Norse eschatological story of Ragnarök and the Crucifixion narrative). These images are meant not only to recall particular texts by way of an iconic representation, but to initiate and encourage the rethinking of these texts by linking them to other

⁷ Any recorded version of an oral composition (story, myth, poem, ritual) can only represent one possible version of a text that existed (and was materialized) in varying individual performances. Reconstructing the urtext (or original or initial version) of any oral story is therefore virtually impossible and often beside the point. Mythological narratives, like other oral stories, underwent numerous changes and evolved into sometimes significantly different versions over time and space, which makes it difficult for modern scholars to identify pictorial representations of myths that only survive in written form from a different time period and/or geographical region. This problem is particularly haunting in the context of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture since most of our written sources come from thirteenth-century Scandinavia and Iceland (except for some skaldic poetry).

texts. These monuments not only include references to various narratives, but also suggest a mental performative practice acted out by an active viewer. In his 1993 article on the anti-iconography of medieval art, Michael Camille pointed out the difficulty of iconographers and art historians in the 'double translation' of medieval images, that is, 'to explore in writing, ideas that might have originated through writing like the Holy Writ, but which were then mediated outside or beyond it, in rituals, prayers, sermons, but most importantly of all, in images' (1993: 44–45). This critical observation is concerned with the impossibility of grasping the texts behind the images because of their oral and/or performative existence. By concentrating mainly on these underlying source texts, an important mental performative aspect of the reception of these artefacts is neglected. The Crucifixion image on the Gosforth cross well illustrates this visual and textual interplay.

Of course, in the Anglo-Scandinavian context the dialogue goes far beyond that of two or more narratives. It is between two different cultural traditions and, most importantly, between the representatives of these traditions who are brought together in communities of the Scandinavian settlement areas of northern England. It is the unique manifestation of this intercultural dialogue in the art of stone sculpture that is the focus of this book.

Sculptural Production in the Viking Period

Pre-Viking stone sculpture in England was an ecclesiastical, primarily monastic art form; thus it was limited in distribution as well as in form and iconography. Anglo-Saxon monasteries and stone churches were decorated with carved architectural panels and some stone furniture, the relics of saints were laid in stone shrines, free-standing crosses were erected as objects of contemplation and remembrance, and the graves of the deceased were marked with slabs or crosses. In the Viking period stone sculpture became a more secular medium, serving the needs and reflecting the taste of the new settlers and the local communities, yet maintaining links with its ecclesiastical origin mostly in terms of form, iconography, and location.

The majority of Viking-Age stone sculpture belongs to the group of free-standing monuments: crosses, slabs, grave markers, hogbacks.⁸ In England they are

⁸ Hogbacks are recumbent carved stone monuments of c. 1.5 m in length, named after their arched form resembling bow-sided halls. They are concentrated in Northern Yorkshire and Cumbria (areas of Hiberno-Norse influence) and generally dated to the tenth century. Cf. Lang 1967; 1972–74; 1984.

located mainly in Yorkshire, Northumberland, Cumbria, Lancashire, Derbyshire, and Lincolnshire, that is, in the northern territories of the geographically rather imprecise Danelaw.⁹ The greatest concentration of Viking-Age sculpture (forty-eight crosses) is found on the Isle of Man, outside of the geographical boundaries of the Danelaw but closely connected to its Anglo-Scandinavian culture. Therefore, the Manx material serves as indispensable comparanda to the Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture of northern England.

The difficulty in studying pre-Conquest stone sculpture lies in the fact that the majority of the monuments survive in fragmented form, in rather worn state, and in most cases not in situ. Judging by the quality of the surviving pieces and sporadic post-medieval documentary evidence, we are led to assume that many other monuments may have been destroyed for various reasons throughout the centuries or were reused in later buildings, either in decorative function or more frequently as simple building material. The present condition of the surviving pieces is misleading in two ways. On the one hand, their often fragmentary nature creates a difficulty in trying to reconstruct the iconographical programme of the original monuments, or even to determine the meaning of individual images. On the other hand, some of the monuments appeared very different to the eyes of the contemporary audience: they were often covered with gesso and paint of various colours (red, black, blue, green, orange) and occasionally also with secondary attachments, such as metal pieces, glass, and gems, in order to recall the characteristics of other media (Bailey 1980: 254; 1996a: 5–9; 1996b). These decorations applied to the crudely cut carved stone surface could add additional iconographical details or inscriptions to the carved patterns and conceal or highlight certain elements, which had an impact on the overall iconography as well as the reception of the monuments. There is not enough evidence to believe that all carvings were coloured and decorated, and the scarcity of gesso and paint residue suggests that many of the carvings were not intended to be painted. Some of the later decorations and additions to carvings (drapery, crowns, etc.) resulted from liturgical use and veneration, in particular of large crucifixes, and were not part of the original design.

Studying stone sculpture, however, also has advantages from an archaeological point of view. Being quite bulky and heavy by nature, stone monuments are

⁹ In spite of its widespread use in scholarly literature to denote the areas of Scandinavian settlement of England from the late ninth century onwards, the term 'Danelaw' does not appear in any surviving document before the eleventh century, and its borders are far from being stable and well defined. In the present study it is used in a general sense to denote the settlement areas under Scandinavian control as a political entity (notoriously unstable as it is) versus the English territories of the South.

fairly immobile artefacts, thus their present locations can with some certainty be assumed to coincide with or be very close to the original place of manufacturing and display. Unfortunately, it does not mean that many carvings are still in situ. The recent history of several monuments relates their moving, for example, from a churchyard or private estate into the local church or museum, obscuring the original location of the monument in relation to burials, the church building, or boundaries, which would be telling about the function of the monuments. Nonetheless, the relative immobility of the artefacts allows us to deduce some information about the relationship of certain geographical regions and local workshops, the distribution of motifs, and to some extent the types of cultural and ethnic communities in areas with surviving sculptural material.

Problems of Dating and Chronology

The absolute dating of Viking-Age stone monuments poses special problems, since there are only a few fixed points that we can rely on. The chief external evidence is the historical framework of the Viking invasion and settlement of the northern and eastern areas of England in the second half of the ninth and the tenth century, as it is recorded in historical and documentary sources and supplemented by material evidence. Even that does not represent a clear-cut divide in sculptural production, since several areas show a continuation of the earlier Anglian tradition. Therefore, the dating of Viking-Age sculpture has been based largely on stylistic evidence, in particular the appearance of artistic features of Scandinavian and Hiberno-Norse origin.

England and Scandinavia had, of course, long established cultural contacts already before the arrival of the Vikings. Scandinavian influence on English art in the pre-Viking period is characterized by contacts between the eastern parts of England and Scandinavia and is manifested, for example, in artefacts from the Sutton Hoo ship burial (c. 625). The period of Viking settlement from the late ninth to the late tenth century is the most intensive period of Scandinavian influence, and is largely confined to the North of England. The third phase is marked by the appearance of Scandinavian artistic elements in the South and is associated with the Danish succession to the English throne in the first half of the eleventh century (in particular the reign of Cnut).¹⁰

¹⁰ See Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1980; Bailey 2001; Fuglesang 1986; and Wilson 1984. The following summary is based on these sources (especially Bailey 2001).

The chronology of artefacts from Viking-Age England has been established partly on the basis of dateable Scandinavian stylistic elements imported into England. This method is problematic not only because of the uncertain dating of the styles in Scandinavia itself, but also because it is hard to predict how long a particular style has been in vogue in the colonies and how colonial fashion influenced the art of the homeland. Although among the monuments discussed in this study only few show characteristic traits of dateable Scandinavian styles, the appearance of these stylistic elements of the Scandinavian homeland does provide us at least with a relative chronology of some of the artefacts.

The earliest influential Viking style was the Borre style, which dominated the art of the Scandinavian homeland from the mid-ninth century onwards and is characterized by the ringchain, a cat-like mask, and types of ribbon ornament based on split bands. Pure examples of Borre style ornaments as well as insular modifications thereof were found among metalwork objects in the York area. Stone sculptures (e.g. at Gosforth, Cumbria, or Burnsall, Yorkshire) display local adaptations and developments of the ringchain in a medium untypical in the Scandinavian homeland.

From the mid-ninth to the late tenth century, partly overlapping with the Borre and the later Mammen styles, Viking art was dominated by the Jellinge style, characterized by ribbon-like animals with contoured outlines and spiral hips. Even though it takes its name from a cup found at Jelling in Denmark, the Jellinge style was largely a 'colonial' style that flourished in the Viking settlement areas of England in the first half of the tenth century and was modified according to the local artistic taste and available material. While pure Jellinge style metalwork finds emerged from York, stone sculpture again shows the mingling of native insular and Viking traditions (e.g. in York Minster, Collingham, and Middleton).

The Mammen style of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries is characterized by double-contoured and pelleted animals with spiral hips, lip-lappets, and small heads and by interlaced bands. This style provides a link between the Jellinge and the Ringerike styles, and enjoyed great popularity in the Scandinavian homeland. It had little impact on the North of England, probably due to the decline of Scandinavian political power and regular contact with the homeland, but sporadic examples appeared from London (bone plaque) and Workington (Cumbria, cross-shaft), and a larger number from the Isle of Man.

The influence of the eleventh-century Ringerike style is associated with Cnut's accession to the English throne and is characteristic of the South of England. Ringerike-style artefacts display profile animals with spiral hips, multiple curving plant tendrils, and pear-shaped lobes. The most outstanding

find in Ringerike style is the famous painted stone slab from St Paul's in London, but other artefacts in stone, metalwork, and bone from the South also display Ringerike elements. The northern areas were not under the influence of this southern fashion; the only known northern example is a stone slab from Otley (Yorkshire). The appearance of the last and most elegant Viking style, the Urnes style with its slender and stylized animals organically interwoven with thin, looping contour lines, falls already into the Norman period in England and leads into Romanesque art. Nonetheless, it indicates the continuing contact between England and Scandinavia and the sensitivity of the post-Conquest insular taste to Scandinavian fashion.

The evolution of Viking artistic styles can be dated on the basis of circumstantial evidence in Scandinavia; however, in many cases we have a longer period of overlap between two stylistic periods. This makes it difficult to suggest more than a relative chronology for insular sculptures with Scandinavian stylistic elements. The uncertainty of the date of arrival of imported Viking styles, the varying degree of their influence from region to region, and their local adaptations and modifications constitute further difficulties of dating. Furthermore, many monuments from northern England, including a number of carvings that constitute the corpus of the present study, do not reflect these decorative artistic styles. There are, however, a few other motifs and stylistic features that, according to Richard Bailey (1980: 58–72), are characteristic of Viking-period sculpture in England and can be used for the dating of monuments. These features include the appearance of a ring connecting the arms of cross heads (a stylistic element of Irish or Scottish origin), the use of ring-knots or woven circles (also found in Scandinavian Borre-style artefacts), and the presence of particular types of interlace patterns (the ring-twist, the looping pattern, and two simple key patterns) (see Bailey 1980: figs 5–7). Last but not least, the limited appearance of the hart-and-hound motif in northern England and the Isle of Man also points to Viking-Age production.

The impact of the Scandinavian settlers on English art was by no means a copying of artistic fashion in the Scandinavian homeland or other Viking settlement areas (Ireland, Scotland, etc.) but rather a modification of the insular artistic taste, which was equally dependent on pre-Viking Anglian artistic traditions. Numerous adaptations and modifications of imported artistic elements according to native traditions show the creative mingling of different tastes and traditions. As far as stone sculpture is concerned, the Scandinavians enriched and revitalized the native tradition of stone carving by introducing new decorative styles and new subjects in iconography and by contributing to the development of a new monument type, the hogback. Some of the new elements

in iconography reflect the influence of Scandinavian mythological and heroic narratives, demonstrating a deeper layer of intellectual influence on the native population, which goes beyond the fashion of styles.

Regarding the dating of Viking-Age sculpture, James Lang (1983: 186) once suggested a relatively short period of intense production, from the late ninth to the mid-tenth century, based on the very limited appearance of late Viking artistic styles (Mammen and Ringerike). The different regions of the North, however, seem to show some variation within this narrow time frame and beyond. While the dating of sculpture is notoriously difficult, a range of suggestions has been put forward in the past decades, based on various arguments, to pin down more specific periods of production.¹¹ It is the Isle of Man that appears to show the longest span of production, *c.* 930–1020 (or already from *c.* 900), and it was from there that certain iconographical and ornamental elements (e.g. the Sigurd legend, the hart-and-hound motif) were imported to the north-western coastal areas (Cumbria and Lancashire) and then further to Yorkshire. Many of the Yorkshire monuments were probably carved after the initial phase of Scandinavian settlement and during the period of Hiberno-Norse influence from the Irish Sea region. Sidebottom (1994) suggested that the majority of the Derbyshire crosses should be dated to 910–50. Most of the Lincolnshire crosses appear to be of a slightly later date, from 950 to 1000, and had been derived from Hiberno-Norse prototypes in Yorkshire, North-West England, and the Isle of Man. Since the majority of Viking-Age sculptures in England are either free-standing monuments or fragments reused in later churches, a more precise dating by contextual relationship and circumstantial evidence is generally impossible (except for the lucky cases of the York Coppergate fragments, found in tenth-century levels during excavations on Coppergate site; see Lang 1991: 103–05). Therefore, instead of assigning particular dates, it seems more accurate to establish relative local chronologies observing regional differences and characteristics.

Artists and Patrons

The production of a carved stone monument in the Viking period was a joint enterprise. It involved a patron, or a group of patrons, who commissioned the work, possibly a designer, who may or may not have been identical with the patron or the carver, the carver-craftsman himself who executed the design, and

¹¹ Cf. Bailey 1978 and 1980: 213; Lang 1978b; Bailey and Lang 1975; Sidebottom 1994; Stocker 2000: 191–92; Richards 2000: 162.

in the case of decorated monuments, possibly a painter and/or metalworker who added the decorations. Runic inscriptions may have also required a separate runemaster. With the exception of a few memorial rune stones, the names of the artists did not survive,¹² and even in those few cases when the names of 'makers' are noted, it is hard to distinguish between the carver and the commissioner of the monument. The role of the patrons or commissioners in the actual production of the sculptures is unclear; besides subsidizing the production financially, they might have also been responsible for or involved in the design to some extent. In the past decades, local workshops, also referred to as schools, and a few individual artists have been identified by their choice of motifs and patterns, their carving techniques, and the repeated use of templates and common grid systems. It had been suggested that some craftsmen were itinerant, especially stone carvers whose products were non-portable (Foote and Wilson 1974: 318). Itinerant carvers could in theory serve multiple patrons and cover large geographical areas, moving between related religious houses, split secular estates, or beyond. However, there is only very limited evidence to support the presence of itinerant carvers in Viking-Age northern England, in contrast with sculptural production within the monastic network of pre-Viking Northumbria (Bailey 1996a: 109–10). Consequently, Viking-Age sculptural production was for the most part centred around regional and local workshops catering to a geographically more immediate market. The main regional schools of the Viking period were located in the York metropolitan area, the coastal areas of north-west Cumbria, Ryedale, the Tees Valley, Lincolnshire, and the Peak District area of Derbyshire (cf. Cramp 1977; Bailey 1980; Sidebottom 1994).

Since some of the stones were found at locations where pre-Viking production of stone monuments can also be attested, we may assume continuity in the activity of local masters or workshops under changing patronage. With the coming of the Viking settlers, especially after 920, the patronage of stone monuments shifted from the ecclesiastical towards the secular, and a new taste developed for warrior portraits and secular images. However, ecclesiastical patronage did not cease. Sites without evidence of pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon work indicate the expansion of sculptural production, which corresponds to the changes in land divisions, ecclesiastical organization, and the transfer of resources to a new secular aristocracy. David Stocker (2000) has shown that in tenth-century Lincolnshire and Yorkshire the distribution of sculpted burial monuments corresponds to

¹² A famous Viking-Age exception is the stone carver Gautr of Michael on the Isle of Man (see Chapter 7).

new parochial foundations and points towards the involvement of single lords and their families (and in a distinct subgroup of sites at trading posts that of elite traders). This secular patronage opened the way to secular influence on the imagery of these previously ecclesiastical monuments.

The majority of Viking-Age sculptures are commemorative monuments. The decoration and iconography of some of them are derived from Scandinavian or Hiberno-Norse prototypes, which indicates either the presence of settlers of Scandinavian origin or the desire of indigenous individuals or communities to associate themselves with Scandinavian culture. The high costs of production (the costs of the monumental stone itself and of its carving and decoration), the freedom to erect a public monument at locations of special importance (church site, land boundaries, etc.), as well as the distinction that it conferred on the person commemorated and the patron suggest that many of them were exclusive monuments of an elite (cf. Stocker 2000: 180).

The social significance of Viking-Age stone sculpture lies in the public nature of the majority of the monuments, which necessarily presupposes a larger community of recipients. As opposed to the majority of ecclesiastical artefacts (including manuscripts, ivories, ecclesiastical vestments, and liturgical objects) directed to the eyes of God or a restricted community, these carvings were meant to reach and be understandable for a more general public. This new orientation and the needs of the new audience are reflected in a change in the iconography of stone carvings in the Viking period and the appearance of monuments with distinctly non-Christian iconography. It is this special group of sculpture that constitutes the corpus of my research.

Monuments with Mythological, Heroic, and Secular Iconography

Establishing the corpus of the present study and categorizing the carvings is not without problems. First, a distinction should be made between traditional Christian images and 'unorthodox' carvings. However, unorthodox representations do not necessarily exclude the possibility of a Christian meaning as the ongoing debate about the identity of the Gosforth lady has demonstrated. Second, among the unorthodox carvings images of Scandinavian mythological and heroic origins have to be identified. These so-called 'pagan' images show the continued influence of the pre-Christian tradition but offer no evidence of actual pagan practices. The study of these carvings poses a number of challenges. The main difficulty is that these insular carvings predate the most conclusive body of comparative material used to interpret their iconography, that is, the literary



Map 1. Distribution map of the monuments discussed.

sources from medieval Scandinavia (mainly Iceland). The chronological gap of two hundred years and more, together with the geographical difference, allows for considerable variation in primarily orally transmitted narratives and their visual representations. The images of pagan gods and mythological events is sometimes further complicated by the lack of supraregional standardized iconography, that is, a conventionalized and consequent use of attributes and depiction patterns, which characterizes Christian art from early on. Furthermore, in the case of intended parallels between mythological/heroic and Christian themes, it is hard to determine the borderline, that is, to identify particular scenes as ‘pagan’ as opposed to Christian, since in some cases we might have a borrowing of a common iconographical pattern from one cultural tradition and its reinterpretation in the other. Finally, those carvings that appear to be portraits of individuals (patrons or the commemorated) without identifiable attributes of either Christian or mythological/heroic characters, fall into the third, and admittedly vague, category of secular images, in part by necessity.

Carvings with pagan (i.e. mythological and heroic) and secular iconography constitute only a small percentage of the surviving corpus of Viking-Age stone sculpture.¹³ However, the total number of these monuments and their relatively wide geographical distribution suggest that we are not dealing with a unique local phenomenon (see Map 1). The meagre corpus probably indicates a low number of originals on the one hand and a poor survival rate on the other. Since the majority of pre-Conquest carvings only survives in fragments, often reused and displayed in a post-Conquest (or even post-medieval) architectural context, we may assume that in their original form some other monuments might have also contained similar 'unorthodox' iconography.

In spite of the difficulties of categorization and interpretation, monuments with mythological and heroic iconography can provide us with unique information of various kinds. On the one hand, they record earlier insular, or rather Anglo-Scandinavian, forms of myths, legends, and saga material that otherwise only survive in later Scandinavian literary sources. On the other hand, they indicate the cultural interest as well as the artistic taste of the Anglo-Scandinavian communities and bear witness to the integration process that brought together peoples of different cultural backgrounds.

The carvings demonstrate various forms or levels of this integration process. An obvious proof of the fact that these monuments were produced in mixed communities is the use of Scandinavian stylistic and iconographical elements in the medium of stone sculpture, shaped and decorated in the Anglo-Saxon fashion.¹⁴ The transference to stone of mythological and heroic elements of

¹³ In a statistical chart of 'Anglo-Scandinavian monuments in Yorkshire' (based on Lang 1991 and earlier publications by Collingwood), David Stocker lists 126 sculptural sites in Yorkshire with a total of 396 monuments (2000: 201). His list needs revisions after the publications of Lang's catalogue of Northern Yorkshire (2001) and Coatsworth's catalogue of Western Yorkshire (2008), but it does give us enough information to estimate the ratio of monuments with mythological and heroic imagery. Out of the total of *c.* 130 or more Anglo-Scandinavian sculptural sites in Yorkshire, thirteen have produced carvings with mythological and heroic imagery (*c.* 10 per cent). The number of relevant monuments compared to the estimated total number of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture is only about 5 per cent (nineteen monuments out of *c.* 400).

¹⁴ The artistic medium of stone was not unknown in the Scandinavian homelands. The tradition of erecting rune stones emerged already in the fourth century, and the Viking Age saw a major boom in rune stones, especially in Sweden and Denmark. The most prolific period of production (*c.* 950–1100) overlaps (and outlasts) the proliferation of Viking-Age sculpture in England. Rune stones, however, constitute a very different art form in terms of shape, design, the role and balance of text and image, location, and function. The picture stones of the island of Gotland, Sweden (cf. Lindqvist 1941–42), represent another, unique group of carved stone monuments from Scandinavia that offer interesting parallels in iconographical details but not

Scandinavian origin that must have reached England on objects of metalwork or perishable media (wood, bone, or textile), or as mental images, can be seen as a form of artistic integration and the emergence of a new artistic taste.

The nature of the iconographical material of Scandinavian origin and the explicitness of the relationship between the non-Christian and Christian images vary greatly in the corpus. As noted above, I have made an attempt to distinguish between secular images and carvings of mythological and heroic origins. Secular images in this context are horsemen, warriors, and other male and female figures that show Scandinavian influence in their designs but are not clearly identifiable as mythological, heroic, or Christian characters. There is of course some arbitrariness involved in this distinction. Since our knowledge of the mythological material is fairly restricted, we have to assume that a figure is secular if we cannot recognize a myth or Christian iconographical tradition behind it. The function of secular portraits on Anglo-Scandinavian monuments seems to be primarily commemorative, and the majority of these sculptures served as memorial stones or possibly as grave markers. Here it is the often cruciform shape of the monuments, their locations at ecclesiastical sites, and the accompanying elements of Christian iconography that are indicators of a Christian context. What this group testifies is social integration with an adaptation of Christian commemorative and burial practices, which is supported also by archaeological evidence.¹⁵ Of course, this is not necessarily proof of the conversion of the Scandinavians, but it certainly indicates their acquaintance with the local Christian practices and their acceptance of them.

The monuments with mythological and heroic iconography can be organized around a handful of topics, which suggests a strong interest in or even fashion of particular themes and narratives and the total neglect of others. The depicted topics include, in an approximate order of frequency, the story of Wayland the smith, Sigurd and the Völsung legend, Ragnarök and related scenes, various representations of evil (the Midgard serpent, Fenrir the wolf, the Bound Evil, etc.), the valkyries, and possibly Odin and the world tree Yggdrasil.¹⁶ A few of these

in overall design and function. Iconographical parallels between the Gotland and the northern English carvings are unlikely to be the result of direct influence and contact between these two areas, but rather of the existence of independent traditions of stone carving that utilized and preserved widespread visual representations circulating in portable media or as mental images.

¹⁵ The distribution of Viking graves found in northern England also supports the idea that the new settlers often utilized the sacred burial grounds of the local Christian population. Cf. Wilson 1967; Halsall 2000; Redmond 2007.

¹⁶ As far as the names of the pagan gods, heroes, and other mythological beings and phenomena are concerned, I use the most commonly accepted Modern English versions of the names

monuments display an iconographical programme where pagan Scandinavian and identifiably Christian elements are consciously combined, which makes them particularly interesting in the present context. The evidence value of these artefacts goes beyond that of social and artistic exchange; they are indicative of a process of cultural integration and religious accommodation.

The Scope and Objectives of the Present Study

In the following chapters this latter group, the small corpus of Viking-Age carvings with mythological and heroic iconography of Scandinavian origin, will be discussed and evaluated as evidence of a religious and cultural integration process. In the first half of the book I will establish the corpus of relevant carvings, with a detailed discussion of individual monuments in thematic groups, together with a survey of the written sources and visual comparative material in stone and other media. The geographical focus of the inquiry is England, where the relevant carvings cluster in the northern and north-western parts of the Danelaw. Monuments from the culturally, socially, and politically related Isle of Man are also discussed as insular comparative material. The rich corpora of Irish and Scottish sculpted monuments are outside of the scope of this survey since they do not serve as immediate sources of images of Scandinavian origin, but they are often noted as parallels to individual motifs. As far as the time frame is concerned, the carvings in question have all been dated to a period between the late ninth and mid-eleventh centuries, the period of Scandinavian invasion and subsequent settlement, the cultural impact of which extended into the eleventh century and beyond. The monuments with mythological and heroic imagery were created probably within a few generations after settlement, the time frame of which varied regionally. The influence of Scandinavian culture was the immediate impetus for the creation of these monuments, but the Anglo-Saxon cultural component was equally relevant. Therefore it is supposed that the sculptures were created in mixed communities or areas of strong Scandinavian cultural and political influence.

It is the term 'Anglo-Scandinavian' that is used customarily to denote this mixed cultural origin and context. It is not without problems though when applied to sculpture. On the one hand, it fails to acknowledge Celtic influence,

wherever possible. Using either the Old Norse or the Old English names would be misleading, since we cannot fully equate the characters and their stories as represented in Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture with those known from Scandinavia or with their earlier insular counterparts.

which was a significant factor especially in the North-West, and on the other, it seems to imply ethnicity that does not necessarily correspond to cultural materiality. The term Hiberno-Norse (used in reference to the Scandinavian settlers of the north-western Danelaw) does indicate the Irish/Celtic influence, but its second component invokes another problem, the question of the Danish-Norse division among the Scandinavian settlers (see Chapter 6). While keeping these potential problems and inaccuracies of terminology in mind, I find the term Anglo-Scandinavian appropriate in the present context because it indicates the dual origins of the artistic and cultural traditions reflected in sculpture. An alternative term is 'Viking-Age sculpture', but it puts more emphasis on the time frame of production as opposed to cultural origins. In terms of cultural identity, Anglo-Scandinavian denotes an identity different from that of the Scandinavian homelands, rooted in the culture of a diaspora in which interaction with the local traditions and integration played an important part. Religion was a significant component of this cultural convergence, and the sculpted monuments indicate an intimate familiarity with Christianity and its artistic traditions, even though they are no direct evidence of conversion. Consequently, we run into a similar terminological difficulty when trying to describe obviously non-Christian (mythological and heroic) images. Referring to them as 'pagan' may be misleading: although their origins lie in the mythological and heroic narratives and characters of the pre-Christian culture of the Vikings, they are no direct indications of pagan religious practices in the insular communities. If it appears in the text, the term shall be understood with this caveat.

The following presentation of the sculptural evidence will first focus on Wayland and Sigurd, two popular heroic figures of the legendary past. The subsequent chapter will explore the mythological stories of divine heroes and their adversaries and their representations in stone sculpture. In establishing the corpus of carvings to be discussed in each section, I cast my net wide and included a number of problematic and even highly doubtful representations that have been suggested in the scholarly literature to have pagan iconography on them. Admittedly, some of the early antiquarian interpretations were quite fanciful and creative, and modern scholarly scrutiny and scepticism of the past decades have discarded some of these interpretations. Justly so. But the ambiguity of some of the carvings that prompted such different interpretations is relevant in the present context, and therefore a number of monuments with 'doubtful imagery' will be included in the discussion. Chapter 3 is specifically dedicated to the murkiest areas of iconographical research, and, not surprisingly, the question mark at the end of the chapter title ('Pagan, Secular, or Christian?') will not be eliminated by the end of the chapter.

In the discussions of the sculptural material I include references to textual sources and comparative material from outside of the British Isles. There was, of course, no general, codified heathen faith shared all over the Germanic world; what we understand under Germanic mythology or Norse belief is a colourful fan of regional varieties of myths and religious practices. Therefore, any comparative material, literary or visual, can only be regarded as a starting point for identifying the myths referenced in the carvings. Since no detailed narrative written records of mythology survive from Viking-Age England, we have to rely on non-insular evidence. This comes mainly from twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland and Norway, which were already Christianized areas at that point. The Scandinavian material can only be regarded as indirect evidence because of the temporal and geographical differences, and should therefore be handled with necessary caution.

Following the discussion of the individual monuments and the origins, function, and reception of heroic and mythological motifs, I will turn to the individuals and communities by and for which the monuments were created. In this context, the carvings will be treated as cultural documents of a many-faceted integration process in the communities of the northern and north-western Danelaw. Accordingly, the second half of the book (Chapters 4–6) is designed to provide a theoretical discussion of the intellectual framework of the carvings and a summary of the cultural and historical context of the monuments. Limitations of this study, both in length and in my expertise, do not allow for detailed discussions of the historical background; therefore the potentials of the sculptural evidence for understanding settlement structure, ecclesiastical organization, and historical aspects of the conversion remain, for now, unexplored.

The objective of the present study has been twofold. First, my aim has been to present all Viking-Age stone monuments of England with images of mythological and heroic origin as one corpus and offer a better understanding of their iconography by exploring a wider range of textual and visual parallels than has ever been done before. Second, I wish to examine sculptures as cultural documents of the conversion and assimilation of the Vikings in England, to define the cultural context of sculptural production, and to explore the intellectual framework of figurative thinking that enabled the process of religious accommodation documented in stone sculpture.

Part I

Images

HEROES OF THE MYTHIC PAST: THE ICONOGRAPHY OF WAYLAND AND SIGURD

The majority of the pagan figural representations from Viking-Age England are centred around two popular characters of the Germanic narrative tradition: Wayland the smith and Sigurd the dragonslayer. In spite of their associations and interactions with various mythical beings and their central positions in the pagan Germanic tradition, Wayland and Sigurd are, technically (or philologically) speaking, not mythological characters, but characters of the heroic tradition. The rest of the figures and stories of Germanic origin represented on Viking-Age carvings are gods and mythical characters proper, at least in their origins. It is doubtful, however, that a strict philological categorization would be sensitive enough to the status of these narratives, both heroic and mythological, in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities, considering the ongoing process of demythologization and historization which had led to the accommodation of these stories and characters in a Christian framework of thought.

Wayland the Smith

The story of Wayland¹ the smith was one of the most widespread legends of the Germanic heritage, as is indicated by the broad geographical and chronological scope of sources from the Continent to Scandinavia and the British Isles. It is

¹ Old Norse *Völundr*; Old English *Weland/Welund*; West Norse *Velent*; Modern High German *Wieland*; Modern English *Wayland*.

hardly surprising that the iconographical and literary records show serious discrepancies in the story, which suggests a constant re-formation of the myth and the coexistence of regional varieties. Due to the lack of Viking-Age written sources from England, it is necessary and unavoidable to draw on Scandinavian and on pre-Viking insular sources to understand the sculptural evidence discussed below, even if we are aware of the regional and temporal differences.

The most important literary sources of the Wayland myth are the Old English elegiac poem *Deor*, the Old Icelandic *Völundarkviða* (Vkv.) of the *Poetic Edda*, and the so-called Velent-episode (*Velents þáttr*) of the West Norse *Þiðreks saga af Bern*.² It is the detailed narrative account of the *Völundarkviða* that is generally taken as the starting point for our understanding of the Wayland legend, even in an insular context. The text survives in the Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda* (GKS 2365, 4to; north-west of Iceland, around 1270) and fragmentarily in manuscript AM 748 I, 4to. It is the most complete narrative representation of the Wayland myth and the oldest surviving literary record from Scandinavia, which probably goes back to an even earlier written source. John McKinnell (2002: 198–200) has suggested a possible insular connection behind the poem, which may contain Old English loan words and may have been influenced by Old English metre. Although the exact nature of this connection is uncertain, the *Völundarkviða*, together with the Velent-episode of the *Þiðreks saga*, serves as a necessary background to understand the insular tradition.

Keeping in mind the possibility of regional varieties, the key episodes of the myth of Wayland are as follows. Wayland, the master smith (also referred to as the Prince of Elves), and his two brothers, Slagfid and Egil, lived with their swan maiden (or valkyrie) wives at a lake. After nine years the maidens left and the two brothers followed in pursuit, while Wayland remained in his smithy waiting for his wife to return. There he was captured by King Niðhad, who, urged by his queen, ordered him hamstrung and imprisoned him on an island to work for him. Among other treasures, the King took from Wayland a magic ring, originally made for the smith's wife, which he gave to his daughter, Beadohild. As a revenge, the captive Wayland lured the two young sons of Niðhad to his smithy, beheaded them, and, in the manner of a skilled craftsman, fashioned cups from their skulls for the King, jewels from their eyes for the Queen, and a brooch from their teeth for Beadohild. Subsequently the Princess also suffered Wayland's revenge: when

² For an English translation of the saga, see Haymes 1988. There are further pieces of evidence in Middle High German, Middle Low German, Danish, French, and Latin sources. For a summary and discussion of these sources, see Nedoma 1988.

she visited the smith to have her broken ring mended, he got her drunk with beer, raped her, fathering a son (the future hero Widia), and took the ring. Having completed his revenge, Wayland escaped by flying or rising into the air.

Pre-Viking Insular Sources of the Wayland Legend

The earliest known literary source of the legend of Wayland comes from the British Isles: it is the Old English poem *Deor*, which survives in the Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral, MS 3501, fol. 100^{r-v}; second half of the tenth century) (Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 178–79; Malone 1977). The poem is a lamentation of the tragic fate and unfortunate professional career of a *scop* (minstrel) named Deor, who, by way of self-consolation, draws on stories of other suffering heroes from the legendary and historical past. The time and place of composition of the text is uncertain. A number of apparently earlier forms in the otherwise late West Saxon language of the poem, as well as numerous references to continental Germanic heritage, may suggest an earlier date of composition, but nothing can be established with certainty. The story of Wayland, or Welund, as he is named in the poem, is mentioned in the first two stanzas, and it is presented as an example of personal misery from Wayland's as well as from Beadohild's point of view (in stanza one and stanza two respectively). The source of *Deor* was probably an insular variant of the Wayland myth without any secondary Scandinavian influence from the Viking Age. This is supported by the use of native Anglo-Saxon forms of the names. The elegiac poem offers no continuous narrative representation. Undoubtedly it wished to activate the audience's detailed knowledge of the story with the help of allusions to the plot, which are, however, insufficient to reconstruct the narrative context and further details of the story.

Two often debated and emended hapax legomena of the text contain allusions to this lost narrative context. The enigmatic expression *be wurman* in line 1 ('Welund him be wurman wræces cunnade' / 'Welund experienced misery (or exile) through *wurman*') is usually explained with one of the following four suggestions, none of which are conclusive (cf. Malone 1977: 6–7; Nedoma 1988: 80–83):

1. Wayland was thrown into a snake pit as a form of punishment (the so-called *ormgarðr*-motif in the Norse context).
2. The expression is to be understood as a *heiti* (poetic synonym) for 'sword' or 'ring', referring to the immediate surroundings of the smith, that is, his own works of art.
3. The phrase is a *heiti* for 'sword' as the instrument of Wayland's hamstringing.

4. Finally, *Wurman* (capitalized) should be read as the name of one of Niðhad's warriors who hamstrung the smith.

On the basis of external linguistic evidence, Richard North (1997: 166) has questioned the correct reading of the phrase as *be wurman*, suggesting that the word *wurman*, traditionally interpreted as a late West Saxon form of Old English *wyrm* (masc. i-noun meaning 'serpent, worm'), may have been miscopied from *wif-men*, thus the sentence reads: 'Welund got to know misery (or exile) through a woman.'³ This reading opens the way for a group of new suggestions around a female figure. The most evident solution is to interpret this female character as Niðhad's wife, as she is the one who initiates Wayland's hamstringing and captivity on the island (Vkv. 17, 7–10).⁴ According to the *Völundarkviða*, she is a *kunnig kván*, a 'wise wife' (16, 1–2; 30, 1–2), where the word *kunnig* implies a kind of magical, even demonic knowledge, making her a counterpart figure to Wayland. It is interesting to note her remark on Wayland, expressing her fear of the 'elvish' smith which results in her command of Wayland's hamstringing (Vkv. 17, 5–6): 'Ámon ero augo | ormi þeim enom frána' ('His eyes remind one of the glittering serpent'). Considering the symbolic meaning of the face/head, it is probably more than a mere coincidence that after Wayland's vengeance on the young princes she receives gems made of their eyes (the symbol of knowledge) and Beadohild, Wayland's bride and the mother of his future son, receives brooches made of teech (the symbol of protection) (Vkv. 25 and 35).

A second hapax legomenon (in line 6) describes Wayland's fettering by *seonebende*, 'sinew-bonds'. It may simply refer to ropes made of animal sinews, but more probably it alludes to his incapacitation, or binding, by hamstringing. The word seems to unite the scenes of fettering and later hamstringing which are clearly separate in the *Völundarkviða*.

An interesting narrative twist in *Deor* which should be noted here is the parallel drawn between the fates of Wayland and Beadohild without establishing a common context or an explicit relation between the two, that is, naming Wayland as the cause of Beadohild's misfortune. Personal misery becomes the thematic core of the story as opposed to the primarily revenge-and-escape plot of the Scandinavian sources.

³ The emendation is based on the fact that the Old English word for 'serpent' occurs in its usual form *wyrm* seven times in *Soul and Body II* (lines 22, 67, 79, 106, 110, 117, and 119), which is the text before *Deor* in the manuscript by the same hand (North 1997: 166; based on Ursula Dronke's suggestion).

⁴ Line references to the *Poetic Edda* as well as the Modern English translations are based on Dronke 1997.



Figure 3. Franks Casket, front panel. London, British Museum. Early eighth century.
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The oldest piece of evidence for the importance of the Wayland myth in Anglo-Saxon England is the Franks Casket, an early eighth-century whalebone box of Northumbrian origin. It contains, along with Old English and Latin inscriptions in Anglo-Saxon runes and Roman characters, iconographical representations of Roman history and mythology, biblical history, and Germanic legend. The front panel of the casket is divided into two scenes with similar compositions in mirror image (Figure 3). The right side, with the Latin caption *mægi* in runes, depicts the Adoration of the Magi. Although the left side bears no explanatory inscription, it has with great certainty been identified as a depiction of the Wayland legend.⁵ The image is traditionally divided into three parts expressing a temporal succession of the events. I would suggest a division into four scenes (the headless corpse; Wayland and Beadohild; the second female figure; the bird-catching scene) and put less emphasis on chronology. Although the interpretation of certain scenes is by no means evident, it is possible to provide a narrative succession reading the picture from the left towards the right side.

⁵ The first interpreters of the panel identified it as the biblical scene of the beheading of John the Baptist (Becker 1973: 78).

The male figure on the left with a strangely bent knee is the crippled smith Wayland. He is in his smithy, and in his pliers he is holding the head of a prince whose headless corpse is under the anvil.⁶ The female figure facing Wayland is Beadohild, the future victim of the second revenge, proffering an object usually interpreted either as the broken ring to be mended or a cup containing beer. The second female figure, carrying a basket with a bottle in it, is most probably the maid accompanying Beadohild, who is known only from the *Þiðreks saga af Bern*.⁷ It may seem faulty to use a thirteenth-century Norwegian text to explain an iconographical source from eighth-century Northumbria, but the idea should not seem so strange if we consider that the saga is based on an earlier, now lost Low German source which in its basic narrative pattern might have stood closer to the Anglo-Saxon version than the eddic lay.⁸ The saga can also be great help for us when trying to understand the significance of the leaf ornaments next to the head of the second female figure. Building up a chain of motifs connecting the four scenes, we may interpret these ornaments as the frame of a winged suit, Wayland's flying device. According to this chain of visual links, scene one, the headless body of the prince, is connected with scene two, Wayland and Beadohild, by the head in the pliers, which again is connected with scene three, the woman with the bottle, through the cup of beer. The leaf ornaments, which also belong to the maid scene, serve, therefore, as a connecting element to scene four, a male figure catching birds. It would seem logical to read this scene as Wayland's brother Egil, the master bowman, collecting feathers for his brother's flying device, as documented in the *Þiðreks saga af Bern*. However, there are two arguments which oppose this interpretation: (1) the figure does not resemble in its iconographical representation the figure of Egil (labelled *ægili*) on the lid of the casket;⁹ and (2) wringing birds' necks is at variance with the basic characteristic feature of a master bow-

⁶ Although the myth mentions two sons murdered, there is only one body depicted here, probably because of the limitations of space. The one body stands as a visual indicator, or abbreviation, for the entire child murder episode (cf. also Oehrl 2009b: 547).

⁷ Nedoma (1990) rejected this interpretation emphasizing the temporal difference between the Franks Casket and the saga and questioning the depiction of such a marginal character. Hauck (1977) interpreted the second female figure as Wayland's valkyrie wife helping him in his revenge.

⁸ The brief reference to Wayland's workmanship in Ekkehard of St Gall's Latin epic poem *Waltharius*, lines 965–66, bears witness to the popularity of the myth in ninth- and tenth-century southern Germany.

⁹ The lid depicts a bowman with a woman (Egil and his swan-maiden wife Ölrún?) defending a fortress against a band of warriors, some of whom seem to be giants. The scene may depict an unknown episode of the life of Egil, Wayland's brother.

man. As the hunting of birds was a typical occupation for boys (Jiriczek 1898: I, 19, cited in Nedoma 1990: 141; cf. also *Piðreks saga*, where the king assumes that his missing children are hunting for birds or animals in the woods), the male figure strangling birds can also be interpreted as one (or by extension both) of Niðhad's sons. This reading would create a link between scenes four and one, thus closing the circle and rounding up the composition (in the manner of insular interlace design). Dissolving the narrative succession into a simultaneous picture while keeping a certain scenic division without panelling disregards the primacy of chronology and puts an emphasis on shared elements between different scenes. A similar organizing principle of visual narratives is also evident, for example, in the Sigurd story on the stone of Ramsundsberget (Sö 101, Södermanland, Sweden) or in the Ragnarök iconography of the Gosforth cross.

Although the depiction of the Wayland legend on the Franks Casket offers obvious visual clues of Wayland's revenge (the child murders already committed, the precious objects of revenge in the making, and the rape about to happen), the real focus of the story is on Wayland's exceptional craftsmanship. This is supported by the thematic organizing principle of the front panel, where the Wayland scene is paired with the presentation of precious gifts by the Magi, and possibly even by the function of the casket itself as a container of treasured objects or a prestige gift. The same artistic feature of Wayland's character is also alluded to in *Deor*, where he constitutes the counterpart of the poet himself: both of them are artists who had to suffer calamities or exile because of their lords. A similar understanding of Wayland is suggested by King Alfred's use of the name of 'Weland the wise goldsmith' when offering an etymological interpretation of *Fabricius* (from Latin *faber*, 'craftsman, smith') in his translation of Boethius's *De consolatio philosophiae* (Metre 10, lines 33–34). But for Alfred Wayland is not only an exceptional craftsman, but also a man of virtues who could not be forcefully deprived of his divinely inspired talent (Millet 2009: 315–18).¹⁰

In other Anglo-Saxon poetic works Wayland's name is mentioned in connection with weapons and armour of special worth and artistic value (*Waldere* I. 2; *Beowulf* 455, 1681),¹¹ which indicates that he was generally understood as an archetypal craftsman. Two Anglo-Saxon place-names, *Welandes smidðe* (now Wayland's Smithy, historically in Berkshire, now Oxfordshire) and *Welandes stocc* (Buckinghamshire), and the numerous folk legends connected with these places

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of Alfred's use of Wayland with a Christian overtone, see Millet 2009.

¹¹ On the references to Wayland and works of (other unnamed) smiths in *Beowulf*, see Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 144.

further testify for Wayland's association with craftsmanship, as well as with magical abilities (widely associated with the semi-sacred power of metallurgy) and supernatural beings (elves, dwarves, or giants) in the insular context (cf. Davidson 1958; Hinton 2003).

Wayland on Viking-Age Stone Monuments

The evidence of Viking-Age carvings from northern England points towards an interest in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities in a further thematic aspect of the Wayland legend: the magical flight of the smith. A group of four or five Yorkshire carvings (two monuments from Leeds, one or two from Sherburn, and a fragment from Bedale) display different versions (and fragments) of the same iconographical pattern of a human figure bound in a flying contrivance. Due to the emphasis on Wayland's flight and wings, a few other carvings of winged figures had sometimes been associated by antiquarians with the iconography of Wayland. While it seems safe to interpret all these figures as angels, there are a few obvious resemblances between these winged figures and the images of the flying Wayland. Therefore we cannot completely exclude the possibility of a visual association with or an allusion to Wayland in his flying contrivance, in particular in a Yorkshire context (cf. Lang 1972).¹²

¹² Without attempting to present a comprehensive picture, I would point to the following monuments as examples. Carvings at Crathorne (1C, Northern Yorkshire), Egglescliffe (1A, Co. Durham), and Brompton (3A, Northern Yorkshire) show frontal figures with large wings that appear to be bound or attached to their bodies by horizontal bars (single or double) across the torso, and in the first two carvings also by an encircling oval line. This is reminiscent of the rings binding Wayland in his flying contrivance. The Brompton figure's wings are oddly triangular, and he is holding a book (?) in his hands. The wings of the Crathorne and Egglescliffe figures are feathered, which is indicated by incised lines, similarly to the Leeds crosses and Sherburn 2. At Crathorne and Egglescliffe the winged figures are paired with representations of evil on the corresponding broad sides of the monuments, suggesting an opposition of good and evil as part of their iconographical programmes (see Rosemary Cramp in Lang 2001: 85 for Crathorne; at Egglescliffe we see a corrupted version of a similar coiling serpent). A combination of birds and beasts on Brompton 3 may similarly represent an opposition of good and evil (see Lang 2001: 68). By contrast, carvings at York Minster (9A, Yorkshire) and Neston (cross fragment 2A, Cheshire) display a very different understanding of winged human figures. Their large, realistic wings are parts of their bodies. The York Minster figure is accompanied on the adjacent side (B) by a fettered Viking-style beast (probably representing evil), while the horizontally positioned Neston figure appears flying above the heads of a couple (now on fragment 5A), possibly the deceased commemorated by the monument (Harding 2002: 138–39). The facing side (2C) is occupied by two men fighting with knives (*ibid*).

The Man in the Flying Contrivance

The most complete version of the 'man in the flying contrivance' composition survives on a much-travelled and fragmented cross shaft from the tenth century,¹³ now in St Peter's parish church of Leeds (no. 1a–k, Western Yorkshire). In the lowest panel of the broad side of the reconstructed cross shaft (side C, fragments g–h–j) a human figure is depicted with arms and legs outstretched (Figure 4). His body is encircled by a large band, and his two arms and the one well visible leg are bound by bars and loops to a contrivance with two large wings and fragments of a small bird's tail. The head of the human figure and of the bird are now broken away. Above his (missing) head, the main figure is grabbing a horizontally positioned female figure by her long hair and trailing dress. A curving line above her waist suggests that she was also held in the beak of the bird-head, similarly to Sherburn 3A (see below). The female figure seems to be holding a downward-curving drinking horn in her hand(s). At the bottom of the panel four or five tools of a smith are scattered. It was Bishop G. F. Browne (1885: 139) who first identified this pattern as Wayland in his flying contrivance and suggested that the scene depicted his carrying off the swan maiden. In light of further details of the same composition preserved on other carvings discussed below, James Lang (1976b: 90–91) identified the scene with the help of a detail of the picture stone Ardre VIII in Gotland, Sweden (see Figure 11 below) as Wayland's escape after his revenge. The winged Wayland is accompanied on the broad sides of the shaft by evangelists or ecclesiastical figures in cloaks (some resembling wings, e.g. Aii, Aiv, and Cii), two on the front and two on the rear side of the cross. Some of them are haloed. The two narrow sides are decorated with geometrical and plant scrolls and interlace of Anglian and Scandinavian style. The lowest panel of the other broad side (A), which corresponds to the Wayland panel, is especially

¹³ The cross had a long and adventurous history, quite unusual for most Viking-period monuments. Its broken pieces, together with a number of other fragments, were found in 1838 when the church tower was demolished to rebuild the parish church. R. D. Chantrell, the architect hired for the rebuilding, assembled the cross from the pieces and set it up in his garden at Oatlands House in 1841. When he left Leeds, he took the cross with him. He lived in various parts of the country, and the cross moved with him. Eventually Chantrell retired to Rottingdean in 1863. After Chantrell's death in 1875, John Gott, the vicar of Leeds, obtained title to the cross, but the sale of Chantrell's house prevented his recovering the monument. Finally the cross was purchased (either by Gott, or according to Coatsworth, by Major R. W. Moore), transported to Leeds by train in 1877, and erected first in the stonemason's yard and then in the parish church in 1880 (Browne 1885: 131–33; Bailey 1980: 23; McGuire and Clark 1987: 6–9; Coatsworth 2008: 198).



Figure 4. Cross shaft in fragments (detail), Leeds Parish Church (no. 1ghj Ciii), Western Yorkshire. Tenth century. Photo: Ken Jukes and Derek Craig. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

interesting. It displays a left-facing figure in a long wing-like cloak, with a helmet on his head (similar to Sockburn 5 or Nunburnholme 1aA), a sword in his right hand, a bird of prey on his shoulder, and a looped interlace knot (a *valknut*?) in front of him (Figure 5). The figure has been variously interpreted as Sigurd (Browne 1885: 139–41), the person commemorated by the cross (Collingwood 1915: 307), Odin (Davidson 1969: 218), or another portrayal of Wayland identified by the attributes of the sword and bird (Lang 1976b: 91–92; McGuire and Clark 1987: 14). A parallel has even been suggested with Elijah (McGuire and Clark 1987: 15). In a Christian context, the presence of the bird would also evoke the figure of St John with his eagle, but the sword is at odds with this reading. The combination of bird and sword suggests the possibility of a secular interpretation, thus Collingwood's idea of the person commemorated by the monument seems convincing. The bird and the sword indicate that he was a warrior of noble status (the Odinic *valknut* symbol would further support this claim), while the

Wayland panel on the other side may suggest his involvement or association with craftsmanship, either as an artisan or as a patron.

There is another fragmentary cross shaft in Leeds (no. 2a–c), now in the City Museum, that shows an almost identical iconographical pattern (on side A of



Figure 5. Cross shaft in fragments (detail), Leeds Parish Church (no. 1ghjk Aiv), Western Yorkshire. Tenth century. Photo: Ken Jukes and Derek Craig. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.



Figure 6. Cross-shaft fragment, Leeds City Museum (no. 2cA), Western Yorkshire. Tenth century. Photo: Ken Jukes and Derek Craig. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

by comparison to a carved stone fragment from Sherburn (no. 3, Eastern Yorkshire; see below), where we find the head of the human figure in the winged contrivance combined with that of a bird. The rest of the highly fragmented cross probably displayed an iconographical programme similar to that of the other Leeds cross, although in a simpler form (as reconstructed by Collingwood 1927: 162, fig. 194). The broad side of the cross (A) with the Wayland design towards the bottom shows in the two upper panels two other human figures, probably ecclesiastics, both cloaked and holding books (now surviving as fragments 2aA and 2bA, see Coatsworth 2008: 202–03). The other three sides contain Scandinavian-style interlace.

Sherburn in Eastern Yorkshire also has possibly two carved fragments with images of the flying Wayland (nos 2 and 3). The connection of the more detailed image on Sherburn 3 to the Wayland iconography is more obvious. The surviv-

fragment c), although there we have left only one wing, the feathered tail, and the lower part of the human figure (Figure 6). The missing head and the upper part of the design were reconstructed by Collingwood (1927: 162, fig. 194) on the basis of the other Leeds cross, and it can be confirmed

ing fragment is of a cross-shaft dated to the late ninth or tenth century. On its broad side (A) it displays a frontal elongated human face with round eyes and a long nose, surrounded by an arch that terminates in a bird's head on the top and thus indicates the body of a large, birdlike creature intertwined with the human being (Figure 7). The upward-looking bird is holding a horizontal female figure in its large beak, gripping her by her waist. The train of her long dress and her pigtail with a characteristic knot are gripped by the human figure reaching upwards. By resemblance to the design on the Leeds crosses, the image has been identified as showing Wayland in his flying contrivance (Lang 1976b: 90–91). The female figure is probably Beadohild, but other suggestions have also been put forward. (For discussion, see below.) The carving resembles in style the other Sherburn piece (no. 2), a cross-shaft fragment of the same date (late ninth to late tenth century) (Figure 8). The carving on its broad side (A) may present a clue to the missing lower part of the image on Sherburn 3: a triangular, feathered tail and parts of two wings of a birdlike figure. The creature is in an upward position and has below its tail the very top of a semicircular human head with what seems to be a dished halo.¹⁴ In spite of their stylistic resemblance, the two Sherburn fragments do not constitute parts of the same original because of the dissimilarity of the interlace patterns on the narrow sides. It is important to note that Sherburn 2A also lacks any human limbs or smith's tools, otherwise characteristic of the Wayland iconography. It may thus represent an unrelated image. According to Lang (1991: 202), the dished halo is a ninth-century Anglian feature, while the Jellinge-style animals on side C point to a tenth-cen-



Figure 7. Fragment of cross shaft, Sherburn (no. 3A), Eastern Yorkshire. Late ninth to late tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

¹⁴ Side C (broad) is badly worn and encrusted with mortar. It shows a fettered beast in profile, possibly interlocked with another. The narrow sides (B and D) each contain runs of interlace.



Figure 8. Fragment of cross shaft, Sherburn (no. 2A), Eastern Yorkshire. Late ninth to late tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

tury context with Scandinavian influence, which nicely illustrates tradition and innovation in Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture. The shape of the beasts indicates that the Sherburn workshop had a more south- and westward orientation, which is also supported by the iconographical connections with Leeds, as opposed to the expected influence of the geographically more immediate Middleton tradition (Lang 1991: 202).

There is one more Yorkshire carving that indicates an interest in Wayland's flight: a hogback fragment from Bedale (no. 6, Northern Yorkshire) dated to the first half of the tenth century. Its long side (A) displays the horizontal image of a human figure bound in a flying contrivance with two triangular wings and a fan-like tail (Figure 9). The man's legs and body are clearly visible and are bound in interlocked rings. The head and one of the arms are missing. The iconography shows close resemblance to the images from Leeds and Sherburn described above, thus it is with certainty

Wayland in his flying contrivance (Lang 1976b). The shorter end (side B) of the fragment also contains a figural scene which might be of significance in the present context. The rather worn carving depicts a group of human figures (Figure 10). According to Lang (2001: 62) the central one is seated in a chair with large bossed terminals, and in his lap he has a crescent-shaped object. One of the flanking figures may carry a ring. Lang (2001: 62) suggested a possible relation of this scene to the Wayland myth, although no representation of this kind is known. As a Christian reading, the Epiphany has been put forward (*ibid.*). Unfortunately, the worn state of the carving makes it impossible to interpret the scene with any certainty. On the other long side (C) of the hogback there are two serpentine dragons knotted together in loops, and on their right (originally in the centre of this side) there is a frontal bust of a human figure in a niche.



Figure 9. Hogback fragment, Bedale (no. 6A).

Figure 10. Hogback fragment, Bedale (no. 6B).

Northern Yorkshire. First half of tenth century. Photos: A. Wiper.
Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

Although the images on the monuments discussed so far differ in minor iconographical details, in their degree of abstraction, and in the quality of carving, they clearly form a distinguishable group of design based on a common iconographical pattern that requires some explanation. The clue to the identification of the details of this iconographical pattern is offered by stone monuments and metalwork finds from Sweden.

Visual Comparanda from Sweden

A recent metalwork find from Uppåkra, Sweden, attests to the wider circulation of one of the key elements of the Viking-Age insular iconography of Wayland: the flying bird-man. The well-preserved bronze fitting (dated *c.* 1000) shows a man strapped into a winged apparatus with a bird's tail and two large wings.¹⁵ His human limbs, torso, and head are clearly distinguishable although the first impression of the object is that of a flying bird, so a certain degree of transformation and integration is certainly intended. Similarly, the creature's upward facing human head with its pointed beard gives the strong impression of the head of a bird with a prominent beak. The figure clearly resembles Wayland in his flying contrivance as represented on the English carvings, with one major

¹⁵ See (with images) <<http://www.uppakra.se/gravdagbok/2011-09-27-ogonkontakt-med-sagans-vasen/>>.

difference: the woman is missing. Whether it points to a different version of the myth or an altogether different character in a bird-suit is yet unclear. On a Viking sword chape from Birka, Sweden we find a similar human figure with his limbs superimposed or bound to the body of a bird.¹⁶ The heads of the man and the bird are here separate, similarly to Leeds 1 and Sherburn 3. Further details are hard to distinguish because of the worn state of the object, but the man seems to be reaching upwards grabbing onto something horizontal that, however, is clearly not a female figure.¹⁷ The insular artists must have been familiar with similar images (of Wayland or other flying bird-man figures) circulating on portable artifacts. These provided them with standardized images that could easily be adapted to local use in a different medium.

The Gotland picture stones Ardre VIII, Ardre III, Alskog kyrka, and possibly Lärbro St Hammars III provide a different kind of evidence and point to a more complex representation of the Wayland myth, comprising also other parts of the story. The most conclusive parallel for the insular tradition is Ardre VIII (Lindqvist 1941–42: I, pl. 59, fig. 139; II, 22–24 and fig. 311), which contains iconographical representations of a number of Scandinavian mythological stories (Figure 11). Lindqvist dated the stone to the second half of the eighth century, while Lori Eschleman (1983) and Lisbeth Imer (2004) have suggested a later date of production (ninth and tenth century respectively). The picture stone presents the Wayland story in an iconic tripartite composition (located in the middle of the lower half of the principal face). In the centre of the picture there is a hut with a grass-covered roof identified as a smithy on the basis of typical instruments of a smith inside it. On the right side there are two headless corpses, the bodies of the two princes, referring to Wayland's first vengeance. For our argument it is the left side of the picture that is of special importance: a bird-like figure leaving the smithy through an opening (window or door) with a female figure above its head. The artists of Viking-Age England used this latter iconographical formula, sometimes in an upright position (turned ninety degrees), to represent the Wayland story. While the birdlike creature can with a fair degree of certainty be identified as the escaping Wayland, the identity of the female figure remains obscure and has thus been explained differently. Based on the *Völundarkviða*, K. Hauck sug-

¹⁶ I would like to thank Sigmund Oehrl who called my attention to this parallel and shared his own drawing of the object. Also see Ambrosiani 2001: 12, figs 1.2–1.3.

¹⁷ A metal fitting from Tissö, Denmark, also shows a winged figure with similar straps on his body, but it has a bird's head and no clearly identifiable human limbs; see <<http://www.uppakra.se/gravdagbok/2011-09-30-tack-for-sasongen-2011/>>. Although similar in style, this find seems unrelated to the Wayland iconography.

gested a reading of the Gotland image as Wayland's valkyrie with her 'crow suit' combined with a special neckring (1977: 14–16). Similarly, in the English context, Bishop Browne (1885: 139) interpreted the figure as the swan-maiden wife, *Alvitr*. Considering the Anglo-Saxon textual tradition of *Deor* and the prominent place of the female figure on the Franks Casket, it is W. G. Collingwood's (1927: 163) and R. Bailey's (1980: 106) identification of the female figure as Beadohild that is most convincing, at least in the insular context. The drinking horn in her hands in Leeds 1 further supports this interpretation. Accordingly, the image shows a combined representation of the rape and escape, and/or a version of the legend in which Beadohild escapes with Wayland.

Sigmund Oehrl (2009b) has recently argued for the presence of Wayland imagery on two other picture stones from Gotland: the stone cist panel of Alskog kyrka and the rune stone Ardre III. The Alskog kyrka stone (Lindqvist 1941–42: II, 13–15; Oehrl 2009b: 542–50 and figs 1–8) offers a composite group of images that probably depicts various episodes of the Wayland myth (as well as other stories). Four water birds and two female figures surrounding a large winged bird-suit, and above it a pentagonal enclosure (lake?) with birds and another bird-suit (although this to me is much less obvious) are indications of the swan-maiden story (the prologue to the revenge-and-escape myth), while a smith with bent knees forging rings next to a beheaded body is reference to the capture of the smith and his revenge. The two bird-suits vaguely resemble the Ardre VIII carving; however, the associated female figure is missing. The Alskog kyrka bird-suits may be an allusion to the dual nature of the swan maidens (and thus not connected to Wayland's escape at all) or an indication of their aid in Wayland's escape. The latter would support Hauck's interpretation of Ardre VIII, but on the insular carvings a reinterpretation of this female figure as Beadohild seems to me more convincing. Much less certain is the interpretation of rune stone Ardre III from the eleventh century, which, according to Oehrl (2009b: 550–52), depicts the smith twice: once sitting at an anvil forging a ring and once crippled and bound. In both cases the figure has characteristics of a bird (beak and wings), which may be an indication of Wayland's ability to transform into a bird as an explanation for his flight. A similar concept of the smith may be recorded on the picture stone of Lärbro St Hammars III (Lindqvist 1941–42: I, pl. 30, fig. 85), where a horizontally flying bird-man is facing or approaching a female figure with a drinking horn. The bird-man is clearly a composite creature with recognizable human elements, and the two superimposed heads (of a bird of prey and a smaller human head) and the position of the human legs clearly resemble elements of the Leeds, Sherburn, and Bedale carvings. The female figure may represent the (soon to be) captive woman (Coatsworth 2008: 202).



Figure 11. Picture stone of Ardre VIII, Gotland, Sweden. Stockholm, Statens historiska museum. Late eighth to tenth century. Photo: Bengt A. Lundberg. Copyright Statens historiska museum.

The Insular Wayland

The textual and visual evidence presented above points to the existence of different versions of the Wayland myth, including an Anglo-Saxon version. This version of the myth differed in its emphasis from the Wayland story known from the Scandinavian sources, while it seemed to have affinities with the older, possibly continental tradition. The Germanic proto-myth, the form of which is unknown, was enriched and modified both in Scandinavia and in Britain. In Scandinavia, external (non-Germanic) narrative material was integrated on the basis of structural and motivic parallels (e.g. the Lappish reference and the story of the swan maidens), while in Anglo-Saxon England the story of the archetypal smith was modified and reinterpreted mainly under the influence of Christianity. I suggest a differentiation between two possible versions of the Wayland legend in the Anglo-Saxon period: (1) a pre-Christian version reflected in the folk traditions centred around the figure of a supernatural (possibly elvish)¹⁸ archetypal craftsman or smith¹⁹ with unusual, even demonic power, and (2) a 'rationalized' (in several ways more heroic) variant which was promoted under the influence of Christianity. This second version treats Wayland as a human being, an exceptionally skilful and wise craftsman. His supernatural (elvish) origin is neglected,²⁰ his art is seen as divinely inspired, and his flight is interpreted in more realistic terms (as a result of his skilful craftsmanship rather than his supernatural ability). The Scandinavian version of the myth, as recorded in the *Völundarkviða*, possibly incorporated or was influenced by a Lappish tradition of shamanic spirit journey,

¹⁸ According to the *Völundarkviða*, Völundr (Wayland) and his brothers are the 'sons of the king of the Lapps' ('synir Finna konungs', introductory prose passage, line 2), but later in the text he is called 'prince/master of the elves' ('álfa lióði', 11.3; 'vísi álfa', 14.4 = 32.2). From medieval German tradition and the *Þiðreks saga* his grandmother and father are known to be giants, and his genealogy is as follows: Wachilt (giantess) > Wade (giant) > Wayland > Widia/Wudga/Vitki. Widia is attested in Anglo-Saxon England in the Old English poem *Waldere* II, lines 4 and 9.

¹⁹ In Old Norse there was no word for 'artist'. The maker of any art object was called a smith (cf. *gullsmiðr*, 'goldsmith'; *steinsmiðr*, 'stone-smith or sculptor'; *járnsmiðr*, 'iron-smith'; *silfrsmiðr*, 'silversmith'; *trésmiðr*, 'woodcarver'), and for a skilful man they used the term *hagr*, 'handy, dexterous' (Foote and Wilson 1974: 316). According to the testimony of literary sources, weapon smiths were looked upon as much more important than jewellers. In Wayland's person both the jeweller and the weapon smith are united, thus he serves as the archetypal craftsman.

²⁰ Elves, who were widely recognized as skilful smiths of valuable objects and weapons, were originally neither negatively nor positively connotated beings. They gradually gained a negative connotation under the influence of Christianity and became associated with demons. Their name was even used as an epithet for Satan in connection with demonic possessions (North 1997: 52–55).

and Wayland's flight in the shape of a bird was the result of a kind of metamorphosis.²¹ This alien cultural element was either unknown (certainly in the pre-Viking period) or rationalized in Anglo-Saxon England, and Wayland's flight was seen in terms of a physical flight, with the use of a flying contrivance.²² The flying contrivance is also present in the *Piðreks saga af Bern*, based mainly on German sources, and may thus represent an older, possibly continental element of the narrative. We might also assume that in the insular humanized-rationalized interpretation of the myth Beadohild gained a more active and central role (partly taking over that of the queen in the Scandinavian and maybe also in the older continental tradition), especially as the mother of Wudga (Widia), Wayland's son (cf. *Waldere* II. 4, 9), which would explain her prominent appearance in *Deor*, her second most important compositional position on the Franks Casket, and her association with an Anglo-Saxon burial place evidenced in a charter (Davidson 1958: 149). Finally, it might also help us identify the female figure in the iconography of the stone carvings, at least in England.

The story of Wayland was not only widely known in Anglo-Saxon England but it was linked with Christian themes already in the pre-Viking period. As we have seen above, on the Franks Casket the Wayland iconography appears in a Christian setting, paired with the Adoration of the Magi, and functions not as a negative counterpart but rather as an analogue to the Christian scene (Webster 1999: 232; Millet 2009: 328–29). Similarly, King Alfred conveys a message of Christian values and divine inspiration through the figure of Wayland, and the elegiac poem *Deor*, possibly of pre-tenth-century date, also has a Christian conclusion. Based on the commentaries of the Venerable Bede interpreting (gold)smiths as an allegory for *doctores* and teachers, Victor Millet (2009: 318–20) argued for the specific significance of Wayland as a 'wise smith' in a Christian context (see also Bradley 1990). The Franks Casket, *Deor*, and Alfred's Boethius translation present Wayland as an exemplum of skill, wisdom, and endurance, which may 'represent a long process of reinventing him as a type of Christian hero' (Thompson 2004: 164). Based on Old English glosses of biblical descriptions that refer to Christ as *smiþ* or *smiþes sunu* (cf. Bradley 1991), Victoria Thompson suggested that the archetypal smith Wayland (together with Sigurd, the foster-son of a smith) should be read as 'types of Christ as well as heroes from familiar Germanic legends' (2004: 166).

²¹ The Wayland depictions on Ardre III and Ardre VIII clearly point in this direction. Cf. Oehrl 2009b: 553.

²² For a discussion of Wayland's flight, see Kopár 2002.

From the tenth century onwards, possibly under Scandinavian influence, the emphasis of the narrative shifted, although the Christian connotation may not have been abandoned. As we have seen above, on the Viking-Age carvings the main attribute of Wayland is his flying contrivance with a pair of wings, which indicates an increased interest in Wayland's flight. On the Leeds crosses, which also contain Christian iconography, Wayland appears in the company of evangelists and ecclesiastical figures in wing-like cloaks. The attribute of wings connects the images of Wayland with the diverse iconography of angels on contemporary stone carvings.²³ Although a direct association of Wayland with angels seems improbable, their common ability to fly and a familiarity with images of winged angels (used as representations of good in opposition to evil) made the iconography of the flying smith acceptable on Christian monuments. To take this association with flight one step further, Thompson has argued that Wayland in his flying machine 'could be seen as a type of the Resurrection or Ascension of Christ; when he has a female figure in his grasp he may be seen as liberating a soul' (2004: 165).

To sum up, Christianity had a twofold influence on the Wayland narrative in Anglo-Saxon England. While preserving the original status of Wayland as archetypal smith and artist-craftsman, (1) it humanized and demythologized the semi-mythological and partly supernatural hero, and (2) it foregrounded certain elements of the story, namely the suffering of Wayland in captivity, already in the pre-Viking period. In the Viking period, in the Anglo-Scandinavian territories of northern England the emphasis shifted again to Wayland's escape by flight, probably influenced by the Scandinavian version of the story and its likely imported visual representation. The new focus on Wayland's flight may have prompted an association with angels and even with Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, whereby He, the *smiþ*, escaped the fetters of mortality (Thompson 2004: 168). For those less acquainted with the Christian teaching, Wayland represented the heroic and wise craftsman, with a secular reference; in the hands of a clergy familiar with the legendary tradition he may have served as a useful example to promote Christianity. Visual representations, by necessity of their iconic nature, followed the shifts of emphasis in the Wayland narrative and can now serve as our guides through the changes of the myth and its reception in Anglo-Saxon England.

²³ On figures of angels on pre-Viking stone sculptures and angel veneration among the Anglo-Saxons, see Pickles 2009.

Sigurd and the Völsung Legend

The only other non-Christian character that received as much attention in Viking-Age stone carvings of the British Isles as the smith Wayland is Sigurd the dragonslayer. Similarly to Wayland, he is also a non-divine, heroic figure who enjoyed great popularity throughout the Viking period. Interestingly, the myths of the two heroes, Wayland and Sigurd, show a number of correspondences, both in narrative and iconographical terms.

The story of Sigurd the dragonslayer²⁴ (or Sigurd the Völsung) is part of the legend of the Völsungs, an elaborate and rather complicated cycle of heroic tales that spans several generations and involves numerous well-known heroes and heroines. Sigurd is only one of them, although his character is central to the legend. The various literary accounts differ greatly in detail, but the main storyline (based largely on the detailed but admittedly late and embellished account of the *Völsunga saga*) can be briefly summarized as follows.

Sigurd was the son of Sigmund, who had died in battle before the hero's birth but the fragments of his sword were kept for his unborn son. The young Sigurd was sent as a foster child to Regin, a skilful smith, who tried his character by tempting and provoking him several times. On Regin's instigation (and following Odin's advice, who appeared in disguise), Sigurd chose the horse Grani, a descendant of Odin's Sleipnir, to be his companion. The treacherous Regin incited Sigurd to slay the dragon Fafnir, who was Regin's own brother, and to retrieve for him Andvari's treasure of gold. The treasure, including a cursed ring that was to bring death to its owner, had previously been taken from the dwarf Andvari by the gods Odin, Loki, and Hönir. It was given to Hreidmar, father of Regin and Fafnir, as a compensation for the death of the third brother, Otr, who, in the shape of an otter, had been accidentally killed by Loki. Out of greed for the treasure, Hreidmar was murdered by Fafnir, who became the guardian of the gold in the shape of a serpentine dragon. To prepare Sigurd for the dragon fight, Regin forged three swords for him. The first two broke when tested on the anvil, but the third one, Gram, which was made from the pieces of Sigmund's sword, proved to be extraordinarily strong. Sigurd succeeded in slaying Fafnir by hiding himself in a pit and thrusting his sword into the dragon from beneath. Following the advice of Odin, who again made an appearance in disguise, the hero bathed in the dragon's blood and became invulnerable except for one spot on his shoul-

²⁴ Old Norse *Sigurðr Fáfnisbani*; in the German tradition (Middle High German/Modern German) *Siegfried*.

der that was covered by a leaf. On Regin's request he roasted Fafnir's heart on a spit, but burnt his finger. While licking his burnt finger he consumed some of the dragon's blood, which enabled him to understand the language of the birds. The birds on a tree nearby revealed to him Regin's plan of killing him, upon which he beheaded the deceitful smith. He took possession of the gold and the cursed ring and packed them on his horse Grani. Subsequently Sigurd met a valkyrie named Brynhild and the two fell in love, but she prophesied the hero's downfall and marriage to another woman. The prophecy was fulfilled after a series of treacherous acts at the courts of Heimar and Gjuki. Sigurd, deceived into forgetting his love for Brynhild, eventually married Gudrun, Gjuki's daughter, and Gudrun's brother Gunnar received Brynhild's hand, with Sigurd's help. Later the deceptions were revealed, and in the end Sigurd was unscrupulously killed in bed by Gudrun's brother Guttorm, assisted by Gunnar and Högni. He was deeply mourned by both Brynhild and Gudrun and followed in death by the heartbroken Brynhild. Later Gudrun's brothers, Gunnar and Högni, were betrayed and suffered a violent death at Atli's court: Högni's heart was cut out and Gunnar was cast into a snake pit with his hands bound. He managed to enchant the snakes by his skilful playing of a harp with his toes, except for one adder that in the end killed him.

The myth of Sigurd and the Völsungs clearly belonged to the most popular narrative materials of Germanic (in particular Scandinavian) heroic poetry and prose. It is recorded in a number of narrative literary accounts, the most extensive and widely known of which are the Old Icelandic *Völsunga saga* (compiled in the second half of the thirteenth century), the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* (c. 1200), the West Norse *Þiðreks saga af Bern* (mid-thirteenth century), and a summary in Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál* of his *Prose Edda* (composed c. 1220). The *Völsunga saga* (*Saga of the Völsungs*) is one of the *fornaldar sögur*, or Legendary Sagas. The prose saga (with occasional poetic insertions) goes back to older heroic lays, some of which survived in the *Poetic Edda*, such as *Atlamál*, *Atlakviða*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, and *Reginismál*, but it also provides additional details of the myth. Among the lays of the *Poetic Edda*, preserved in the Codex Regius, *Reginismál* and *Fáfnismál* record the story of Sigurd's youth, *Sigrdrífumál* is about his encounter with the valkyrie Sigrdrífa (Brynhild in the saga), *Gudrúnarkviða in fyrsta* and *önnur* report on his violent death, Gudrun's mourning for him, and the fate of her and of Brynhild, and *Grípisspá* gives a summary of Sigurd's life in the form of a prophecy. In addition, there were at least three other Sigurd lays, of which only two survive: *Sigurðarkviða in forna*, usually called *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* because of its now fragmentary nature, *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, and a now lost longer *Sigurðarkviða (in meiri)*, which originally consisted of more than 160 stanzas (Simek and Pálsson 1987: 315–16). In the surviving corpus of skaldic poetry, the Sigurd legend is

referenced in a stanza by Þórfinnr munnr (d. 1030), based on a depiction of the dragon killing on a textile, as well as in the work of Illugi Bryndælaskáld (first half of the eleventh century), in *Háttalykill* (c. 1145), and in *Sigurðardrápa* by Kormákr Ogmundarson (c. 960). There are further allusions to possible poetic versions of the story by Þórvaldr enn veili (d. 999) and Sighvat (997–1047), but the actual texts do not survive. Finally, the *Bjarkamál* offers two kennings (*Grana fagrbyrðr*, ‘Grani’s burden’ and *Otrs gjöld*, ‘the otter’s (or Otr’s) penance/fine’) that relate to the legend (Düwel 1986: 232–33).

The thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, mentioned above in connection with the Wayland legend, also recounts a version of the tale of Sigurd but with a number of modifications both in the names of the characters (e.g. there the smith is called Mimir, and Regin is the dragon) and in the storyline itself. The character of Sigurd/Siegfried is also well attested in Middle High German works (in the *Dietrichsepen*). Among the non-narrative sources of the legend Sigurd’s name appears in a number of prose texts of the (primarily later) Viking period (*Flóamanna saga*, *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Njáls saga*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, *Flatayjarbók*, *Rauðs þáttur*, *Norna-Gests þáttur*, *Þorsteins þáttur skelks*, chapter 328 of *Óláfs saga Helga*, *Sneglu-Halla þáttur*) mainly as a genealogical reference or, by way of comparison, in a moral or ethical context (Rowe 2006: 170).²⁵

Pictorial Representations from Scandinavia

The popularity of the Völsung legend is further confirmed by an unusually high number of visual representations from medieval Scandinavia and the British Isles. In fact, the earliest known representations of the legend survive in pictorial form. These early depictions from Viking-Age Scandinavia present select episodes of the story without panel division. Sue Margeson (1980: 184) suggested the following list of diagnostic features (frequently depicted episodes) for the identification of the pictorial representations of the legend:

Sigurd scenes: the smith Regin who forges a sword for the hero; the killing of Fafnir the dragon from beneath; the roasting of Fafnir’s heart and Sigurd sucking his thumb; the birds who warn Sigurd of Regin’s treachery; Grani, the horse loaded with the treasure.

Gunnar scenes: a bound figure surrounded by snakes playing the harp with his toes.

²⁵ For a systematic overview of the moral interpretation of Sigurd’s character in Old Norse literature, see Rowe 2006.

Similarly, Klaus Düwel (1986: 229–32) emphasized the following sequence of key elements as essential identifying features of representations of the Sigurd legend: (1) the dragon slaying with a sword from beneath, with Sigurd's legs depicted in a bent position (indicating his hiding in a pit); the double scene of (2) the roasting of the dragon's heart and (3) Sigurd licking his thumb; (4) the birds' advice; (5) Regin's murder; and finally (6) the acquisition of the treasure indicated by Grani loaded with the treasure. The central motif and key visual signifier of the legend was undoubtedly the piercing of the dragon's body (*Drachenstich*) (cf. Düwel 1986: 234) that alone, even in a simplified form (without Sigurd), was sufficient to recall the entire legend of the deeds of young Sigurd in the most economical depictions (unlike Düwel 1986: 247). The appearance and frequency of the other episodes in a given region and time period may be conclusive about the regional and temporal variant of the story as well as its main points of interest for the local community.

A detailed survey of the entire Scandinavian material would exceed the limits of this chapter, thus only the most important pre-Romanesque monuments will be listed here as comparative material to the insular depictions.²⁶ The earliest, though rather uncertain, representation of the Völsung legend is a wood carving on the front of the Oseberg cart (c. 800) that has been identified as Gunnar in the snake pit. The image (a man among snakes) is related to a number of other early representations on picture stones from Gotland (e.g. Klinte Hunninge I, Ardre VIII) and on metalwork found in Gotland and the British Isles (in Scotland as well as on late Saxon stirrup-strap mounts of Class A, Type 3, cf. Williams 1997: 36–39). The identification of this early iconographical pattern as Gunnar in the snake pit is uncertain; it could also be an archetypical depiction of a hero's struggle with beasts. Interestingly, a similar image appears on a baptismal font from Norum, Sweden (Bo NYIR 3, Bohuslän; dated c. 1100) depicting a man attacked by four snakes.²⁷ The carving may either document a 'typological' use of the Gunnar's story in a Christian context, or the iconographical pattern may have been borrowed from pre-Christian iconography to represent a tormented soul in hell. On the rune stone of Västerljung church (Sö 40, Södermanland) we find

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of the Sigurd iconography, with illustrations, see Ploss 1966 and Düwel 1986.

²⁷ The numbering of the Swedish rune stones follows the standard numbering used by the Scandinavian Runic-text Database, or Rundata project (Samnordisk runtextdatabas, University of Uppsala, Sweden; database available online at <<http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>>). The dates are based on Anne-Sophie Gräslund's style-based dating system (in English in Gräslund 2006).

a different iconographical tradition of Gunnar: there he is depicted in profile, seated and bound, and attacked by snakes. An intended Christian connection is suggested by a large cross in the upper half of the same side of the monument.

The best defined scenes of the Sigurd cycle survive in Sweden and Norway. The Swedish material comprises five to ten narrative carvings from the western part of Sweden. An elaborate carving on a natural rock from Ramsundsberget (Sö 101, Södermanland, *c.* 1010–40) depicts various scenes of the story without scenic division, but encircled in an oval band of three interlocking serpents (the lower half of which is a rune band²⁸ and the upper one, made up of two serpents, a decorated line). Fafnir, the serpentine dragon, appears as the rune band that frames the groups of images; the only figure outside the frame is Sigurd killing Fafnir with a large sword from below. Within the frame we find (from left to right) the decapitated body of Regin surrounded by his smith's tools, Sigurd (with overlarge hands) roasting Fafnir's heart and sucking his thumb, above it a small quadruped representing Otr (otter), on the right side Grani, the horse, with a small treasure box on his back and tied to a tree from which a snake emerges, and finally two birds sitting on the same tree. A similar carving with the same motifs survives on a rune stone from Gök (Sö 327, Södermanland, first half of the eleventh century). Even though it displays largely the same iconographical elements, the framed image is rather disorganized, the figures are misshapen (almost surrealistic), and it seems to show a number of misinterpretations of an earlier model, possibly the stone of Ramsundberget or a related monument. The carving also contains a large cross placed in the centre of the image. On a memorial rune stone from Drävle, now in Göksbo (U 1163, Uppland, *c.* 1020–50) we also have Sigurd piercing the dragon (as rune band), but this time he is inside the frame. Below him there is a tree surrounded by a male figure on the left holding a large ring and a female with a drinking horn on the right. The scene probably represents Sigurd wooing Brynhild (Sigrðrifa) (Margeson 1980: 193), a narrative element not identified elsewhere in visual sources. An inferior imitation of the Drävle image is found on the rune stone of Stora Ramsjö (U 1175, Uppland), which contains nonsensical runes. The same iconography appears in a further simplified form on the rune stone of Årsunda (Gs 9, Gästrikland). The original rune stones of Ocklebo (Gs 19,

²⁸ English translation of the runic inscription: 'Sigríðr, Alríkr's mother, Ormr's daughter, made this bridge for the soul of Holmgeirr, her husband Sigrðr's father.' The Ramsundsberget carving is a bridge stone, a monument erected to commemorate the building of a bridge. In the conversion period bridges were considered prestigious soul-gifts in memory of the deceased (or in the builder's honour) that were encouraged by the Church (Sawyer 2000: 134–35). The monument is therefore from a Christian context in spite of its pre-Christian iconography.

Gästrikland) and Österfärnebo (Gs 2, Gästrikland) may also have depicted scenes from the Völsung legend, together with other figural scenes, but the iconography of the carvings is very uncertain. The present Ocklebo rune stone is only a copy of the original that was destroyed in a fire, and the Österfärnebo stone survives only as a fragment. Both were reconstructed on the basis of earlier drawings of the originals and show resemblance in their iconography.²⁹ Lastly, the eighth- or ninth-century picture stone of Klinte Hunninge I (Gotland), which predates the above-mentioned monuments, has two figural scenes that may possibly be connected to the Völsung legend: a man in a snake pit with a female figure standing by, possibly Gunnar and Gudrun, in the middle part of the stone and a man with a large ring in the upper panel.

The Norwegian material of three stones is dated to the eleventh century on the basis of Ringerike-style elements on them. The rune stone from Alstad (Oppland, c. 1000) shows a large bird of prey, a man on a horse with a hawk accompanied by two dogs, a riderless horse, and a horseman with a weapon. It may depict an episode from a different version of the legend as recorded in the *Nibelungenlied*: the return of Grani with Gunther (Gunnar) and Hagen (Högni) after the killing of Siegfried (Sigurd) at hunting. The Tanberg stone (Buskerud) is an unfinished carving, possibly a trial piece. It shows a sword piercing through a dragon, similarly to the Swedish pattern. Although there is no human figure to wield the sword, the presence of the *Drachenstich* seems sufficient enough to record the Sigurd legend.³⁰ The most uncertain representation is that on the Gran stone (Oppland) which only shows tools of a smith, but no further reference is given either to Regin or to any other part of the Völsung legend (Margeson 1980: 194).

The most amazing and detailed pictorial representations of the legend of the Völsungs are undoubtedly the twelfth- and thirteenth-century carvings on the wooden portals of stave churches in Norway, the most elaborate examples of which are the ones in Hylestad, Vegusdal, and Austad (in Aust-Agder), dated to the late twelfth century, and those in Lardal (Vestfold) and Mael (Upper Telemark), dated to the thirteenth century. Further examples include the carvings from Nes and Lunde (Telemark), both dated to the twelfth century, which depict the killing of Fafnir by Sigurd. These Romanesque carvings show episodic division in the form of medallions, and their positioning as church portals suggests an association of the mythical pre-Christian dragonslayer with St Michael, whose

²⁹ Österfärnebo is explicitly rejected by Düwel (1986: 237–38) as a depiction of the Sigurd story.

³⁰ On the blade of an eleventh-century axe from Vladimir-Susdal in Russia we find a similar, highly stylized serpentine dragon pierced through by a sword (Bailey 1980: 119).

victory over the dragon (Revelations 20. 1–2) is usually depicted in the same position on continental Romanesque churches.³¹

The Insular Evidence

The presence of various pictorial representations of the story of the Völsungs in the British Isles testifies to the popularity of the legend also in this part of the Germanic-speaking world, even though no written narrative account survives from this region. A reference to Sigemund (Sigmund, the father of Sigurd in the Scandinavian and German sources) and Fitela (Old Norse Sinfjötli), who is both his nephew and his son, in *Beowulf* (lines 874–97) indicates that at least parts of the Völsung legend were well known to the Anglo-Saxons. The account of Sigemund in *Beowulf* focuses on his slaying of a dragon with other deeds alluded to only in general terms. This suggests that the insular version of the legend differed from the extant Norse variant where the dragon killing is attributed to Sigurd.³² In the fragmentary skaldic poem *Eiríksmál*, composed as a tribute to Erik Bloodaxe, the last Viking king of York (d. 954), Erik meets the same two heroic members of the Völsung family, Sigemund (Sigmundr) and Sinfjötli (Sinfjätli) when arriving at Valhalla (stanzas 4–5). References to the extended Völsung legend (the court of Atli) are also found in the Old English poems *Widsith* and *Waldere*.

In the Anglo-Scandinavian context the popularity of the Völsung legend might further be explained by its association with the semi-legendary figure of Ragnar Lothbrok and his descendants, Ivar the Boneless and Halfdan, leaders of the ‘great heathen army’ and Viking rulers of York, and Ragnald, king of York. In the surviving manuscripts of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (*The Saga of Ragnar Lothbrok*), the *Völsunga saga* functions as an introductory story (*Vorgeschichte*) to the saga (Simek and Pálsson 1987: 393). The sagas of the Völsungs and of Ragnar Lothbrok provided several possible links and points of overlap, which may have promoted the association. On a narrative level, Ragnar was also said to be the slayer of a monstrous dragon (cf. Sigurd), and he found his death in a snake pit at the court of King Ella of Northumbria (cf. Gunnar’s death at Atli’s court). According to Jan de Vries, these two elements belonged to an earlier phase

³¹ On the Norwegian stave-church portals, see Byock 1990, Blindheim 1973, Blindheim 1965, Hohler 1999, Lindholm 1969.

³² Ellis 1942a; Jack 1994: 78–79, footnotes to lines 874b–97, 875, 877, 881, and 892; and Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008: 166–68, with further references to scholarship.

in the gradual development of contact between the two groups of legends (1928: 289–90). In the later phases of development, a further significant connection was established, a marital link between Ragnar and Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurd, as recorded in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. The idea of the marriage between Áslaug and Ragnar may have been the result of the conscious effort to create a genealogical link between Ragnar's descendants and Sigurd (McTurk 1991: 97).³³ The above-mentioned skaldic encomium *Eiríksmál* indicates an interest also in the earlier part of the Völsung legend, the story of Sigmund, among the followers of Erik Bloodaxe, son of the Norwegian king Harald Fairhair, who himself counted Ragnar and ultimately Sigurd among his ancestors.

In spite of the fact that the earliest written sources of the Völsung cycle are from the later medieval period, we have seen visual evidence above for the existence of all major narrative scenes already in the Viking Age (if not earlier), and the insular visual evidence further supports this claim. The majority of the insular depictions is dated to the Viking period and comes from the northern areas, except for the late Saxon stirrup strap mounts with a rather uncertain iconography of Gunnar in the snake pit (see above). According to the testimony of surviving Scandinavian woodwork from a slightly later period and of literary references to tapestry,³⁴ we may suppose that depictions of the Völsung legend were imported to and circulated in England in a variety of artistic media. The surviving insular representations of the Sigurd story are in stone,³⁵ are confined geographically to the Isle of Man, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, and are dated to the tenth and early eleventh centuries. The only possible exception, a southern example, the so-called Winchester 'Sigmund relief', will be discussed below with the northern English evidence.

From the Isle of Man we have three carved cross slabs from Jurby, Malew (both made shortly after 950), and Andreas (second half of the tenth century), and the remains of a cross shaft from Ramsey (now in Maughold; made around

³³ A further, more ancient and subtle connection of the two legends may exist through their origins in and associations with fertility rituals. According to Jan de Vries (1956: 455) and others, the stories of Sigmund, Sigurd, and the Völsungs originated, among others, in rituals of creation and fertility, and Rory McTurk (1991: 16–39, 97) has argued for the origins of the name *Loðbrók* in the figure of a fertility goddess and associated fertility rites.

³⁴ See the skaldic poem of Þórfinnr munnr (noted above) on a decorative tapestry in a hall that depicted the killing of Fafnir.

³⁵ H. R. Ellis Davidson (1950: 135–36) mentions a little bronze cylindrical workbox of mid-seventh-century date from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Burwell, which shows a human figure plunging a weapon into the underside of a dragon. The figure seems to be lying flat and stabbing upwards, which might prompt an identification of the scene as Sigurd killing Fafnir.

1000). The stone slab from Jurby (no. 119 (93)),³⁶ with the remains of a ring-headed cross on it, depicts under the right lateral arm Sigurd killing Fafnir from a pit. Even though the image is vertical, a semicircular line between Sigurd and the serpentine dragon as well as the bodily postures of both figures indicate that the hero is attacking from beneath. Below this scene there is a rather worn human figure raising his left hand to his mouth while in his right hand holding a stick or spit with something on the end of it. The image is a depiction of Sigurd roasting Fafnir's heart. Beneath him is a quadruped, probably a horse. On the very worn Malew slab (no. 120 (94)) we also find the killing of Fafnir depicted in a similar way under the right lateral arm. Above it Sigurd is shown roasting Fafnir's heart: a seated man in a helmet is sucking his left thumb, while in his right hand he is holding a stick with two circular objects on it. The horse on the left side of the cross is Grani. The stone slab from Andreas (no. 121 (95)) displays under the left arm of the cross (from the bottom towards the top) the serpent-like Fafnir being killed by Sigurd, Sigurd's roasting Fafnir's heart with his thumb in his mouth and holding a stick with three slices of the heart on it over flames of fire, the head of the horse Grani, with a runic graffiti on his neck reading **kan** (Margeson 1983: 100), and the head of a bird. On the reverse side, in the centre of the cross stem, a bound figure surrounded by snakes may represent Gunnar in the snake pit. The fragment of a stone cross found at Ramsey (now Maughold no. 122 (96)) shows, in addition to smith's tools, a stick with rings on it (which alludes to Sigurd's roasting the dragon's heart on a spit), a horse with a pack on its back, and an early scene from the Sigurd story at the bottom of the face: an otter with a fish in its mouth. Next to the spread-eagled otter is a seated figure lifting his right hand with something in it. It is tempting to interpret it as Sigurd roasting the dragon's heart, but its displacement from the stick allows for another reading as Loki aiming at the otter with a stone in his hand (Ellis 1942b: 230).

There is one more carving that should be mentioned here, from Govan on the Clyde (Glasgow), because of its significance as comparative material for the interpretation of the iconography of the Nunburnholme cross. It shows two figures seated opposite each other, one of them with his hand raised to his mouth and the other with a misshapen head. The object between them could be an anvil or a spit (Bailey 1980: 122), and the scene might depict Sigurd's meal (cf. Nunburnholme cross below).

³⁶ The dual numbering of the Manx crosses results from the fact that in 1928, twenty-one years after his publication of the corpus of Manx crosses (1907), Philip Kermode instituted a new numbering of the monuments, revising his earlier system. The brass discs attached to the cross slabs perpetuate the later numbering (here the first numbers), while the numbers in brackets are the original catalogue numbers in Kermode's publication of 1907.

Points of the Wayland-Sigurd Overlap

Before the actual discussion of the Viking-Age stone monuments from England, we need to make a short detour here to examine an interesting question, namely the possible overlap of the stories of Wayland and Sigurd, since it will be necessary for the interpretation of the iconography of some of the carvings.

The iconographical overlap between the two smiths, Wayland and Regin, had been recognized already by Bishop Browne (1885: 143). The Wayland story in general has several narrative elements in common with the Sigurd cycle (cf. Davidson 1958: 154 and 1969: 224), and the two stories may have even been confused in northern England (Lang 1976b: 90; Bailey 1980: 116). The elements shared between the two stories are (1) references to a smith and smithy scene (Wayland working for Niðhad, cf. Regin forging a sword for Sigurd and Sigurd testing his sword on the anvil), (2) a cunning smith of supernatural origin or relatives (Wayland's elvish origin, cf. Regin, the dwarf-smith, brother of the shape-shifters Fafnir and Otr), (3) a headless body (Niðhad's sons killed by Wayland, cf. Sigurd decapitating Regin (according to *Fáfnismál* 39 and *Völsunga saga* 20)), (4) a magical ring (Wayland's ring for/from his swan wife later given to Beadohild, cf. Andvari's ring), (5) a wonderful horse (Wayland's horse, Skemming, mentioned in the *Þiðreks saga*, cf. Grani, Sigurd's horse), (6) a valkyrie bride (Wayland's swan maiden, often associated with valkyries, cf. Brynhild/Sigrdrífa), (7) the motif of brutal vengeance, and (8) killing of young princes and turning their skulls into drinking cups (Wayland's revenge on Niðhad, cf. Gudrun's revenge on Atli by having his two sons killed and drinking cups made out of their skulls).³⁷ The high number of common narrative elements might indicate that the two stories both go back to a typical heroic proto-myth, which, according to H. R. Ellis Davidson, might have been related to the cult of Odin (1969: 224).³⁸

The association of the two stories with each other in Anglo-Scandinavian England is demonstrated by the sharing, or possibly even borrowing, of certain iconographical elements, especially from the Wayland iconography to depict the Sigurd legend, as we will see on some of the monuments discussed below. In some cases the shared or borrowed visual elements add new features to the original narrative which are unattested elsewhere.³⁹

³⁷ A further point of overlap might be referred to in the enigmatic phrase 'be wurman' in line 1a of the Old English poem *Deor*, which might be an allusion to a snake pit, suggesting a parallel between Wayland's and Gunnar's punishments.

³⁸ Jan de Vries saw the origins of the Völsung legend in fertility rituals, among others (1956: 455).

³⁹ According to Victoria Thompson (2004: 168), the cross slab from Kilmorie, Galloway,

The Völsung Legend on Pre-Conquest Stone Monuments from England

The English sculptural evidence of the Sigurd legend comprises as many as eight surviving carvings (plus one rather questionable monument) from the North of England, and one problematic monument from the South. The two most complex northern monuments, the crosses of Halton and Nunburnholme, have induced much disagreement in the scholarly literature of the Sigurd iconography.

The eastern side (C) of the lower shaft of a reconstructed composite cross⁴⁰ at St Wilfrid's Churchyard at Halton (no. 1, Lancashire; tenth century) displays three figurative carvings which had been recognized already in the late nineteenth century by W. S. Calverly (in Bailey 2010: 181) and H. C. March (1891: 62–63) as related to the Sigurd story (Figure 12). In the largest panel at the bottom of the shaft, a smith (Regin) is shown at work, seated at an anvil, and identified by his tools (bellows, pliers, hammers) as well his product, a sword, scattered around. The panel also contains a headless body in the upper right section with a serpentine interlace (a ring-encircled twist) above it. Interestingly enough, Regin is depicted twice in the same panel: he is seated at the anvil and he is lying headless above. According to Lang (1976b: 90), one of the two figures is out of sequence, which may be the result of the mixing of the Wayland and the Sigurd narratives or their iconographies, and the headless body might have been borrowed from the Wayland depictions (cf. Franks Casket). It is more likely, however, that the panel represents a non-sequential narrative representation of two separate scenes, the forging of Sigurd's sword and Regin's later beheading, grouped together because of the shared character of Regin. In that case the smithy functions as a means of identification for the headless body of Regin the smith, even though the actual act of beheading did not happen there. The upper panel of this face is divided into two parts. The lower half depicts Sigurd roasting Fafnir's heart, where Sigurd is seen in profile with his left hand raised as if he were sucking his thumb, and he

may provide an interesting example of amalgamating the figures of Wayland and Sigurd and incorporating the iconography of the smith, an element shared in both legends, into a complex Christian iconographical programme. The cross slab shows a man with two birds on his right and smith's tools on his left. He is positioned right below Christ crucified. On the other side of the monument there is a cross head with a chalice with a plant scroll, and a group of serpents in the cross shaft. Thompson interprets the human figure as both Sigurd and Wayland, attributed with elements common to both stories, the birds and the smith's tools. As for the overall programme of the monument, her reading is 'an invitation to cast off the old self of sin and enter a new life' (2004: 186).

⁴⁰ The present reconstructed cross comprises fragments nos 1, 2, 8, 9, and 10 of Halton St Wilfrid (Bailey 2010: 178, fig. 20).



Figure 12. Cross shaft (detail), Halton (no. 1C), Lancashire. Tenth century. Photo: John Miller.

is holding a spit above a fire. In the upper half two birds are sitting in a bush or tree.

The northern side of the cross shaft (D) is more problematic (Figure 13). The carvings of the lower panels are largely weathered away and thus inconclusive. In the middle panel there is an elegant, riderless horse, and in the panel above two large intertwining serpents. Below the horse is a (now) undecorated empty square, possibly for a (painted?) inscription. Both the horse and the serpents are possible elements of the Sigurd iconography (as Grani and Gunnar's snake pit), but both images here deviate from the norm: the horse has no burden on his back, and there is no human figure in the snake panel. Trying to account for these deviations, March (1891: 63) interpreted the carvings as Grani returning riderless after Sigurd's death and the snake pit awaiting Gunnar. The same riderless and burdenless horse appeared on the (now lost) carving of Kirby Hill 9C (see Figure 16 below),⁴¹ facing an iconic image of the piercing of the dragon, an abbreviated representation of the *Drachenstich* motif (cf. Tanberg

⁴¹ There is a riderless horse with no burden also on the Ockelbo rune stone (see above), but its identification is unclear.



Figure 13. Cross shaft, Halton (no. 1, faces A, B, C, and D), Lancashire. Tenth century.
Photo: John Miller.

stone, Norway; Vladimir Susdal axe, Russia). There is therefore an unmistakable context of Sigurd iconography on both monuments although the scenes represented are different. The burdenless horse is thus a further example of a visual abbreviation, in this case of the acquisition of the treasure or the treasure itself, and not of a much later episode after Sigurd's death as March suggested. The interpretation of the serpents as Gunnar's snake pit is questionable due to the lack of a human figure otherwise always present. The two serpents may be a reference to Fafnir instead, whose killing is implied by Sigurd's roasting of his heart, but the scene is otherwise unrepresented on the surviving fragment of the shaft. The carving of Ramsundsberget and a grave slab of York Minster also show multiple snakes in that context, although in each case one of the serpents is clearly pierced by the hero. Bailey (2010: 181) suggested that the serpentine interlace in the lower panel of side C may also be a reference (or be the only reference) to Fafnir. It is possible, of course, that the imagery on side D is independent of the Sigurd story, as are



Figure 14. Cross-shaft fragment, Nunburnholme (nos 1aB and 1bD), Eastern Yorkshire. Late ninth to early tenth century. Photo: Martin K. Foys and Steven Rose.

the western and southern sides (A and B), but I hold the Grani interpretation highly plausible. The western side of the cross (A) displays entirely Christian iconography, probably symbolizing the Resurrection and the Eucharist: a vacant cross is surrounded by two figures (disciples?), below them two chalices(?), and above them Christ enthroned, with two smaller figures sitting at his feet (reminiscent of Nunburnholme 1bD, see below). The southern face (B) of the cross shaft contains only inter-lace patterns.

The two surviving fragments of the impressive cross shaft of Nunburnholme (no. 1a–b, Eastern Yorkshire) were discovered in 1873, both built into the wall of the church. The two (originally non-adjacent) pieces have been reconstructed and the shaft was re-erected in its present location inside the church tower. However, the fragments were fitted together wrongly, having been turned 180 degrees in relation to each other and missing a piece in the middle. Since the present condition does not reflect the original iconography of the shaft, in the following the original faces will be described.⁴²

⁴² James Lang established the work of three subsequent hands on the shaft, dated to the late ninth to early tenth century. The first sculptor was responsible for the overall design and the carvings on face D and parts of face A. His unfinished work was continued by the second sculptor, a less able artist, who completed face A and made most of face B and face C. He was probably also responsible for the intrusive carving on the lower panel of face D, which is of significance for

It is the lower part of face D (fragment b, north) that displays a scene related to the Sigurd iconography (Figure 14). It shows two small sitting figures that were added to the original cross by a second sculptor on top of a larger figure holding a cup-like chalice in his right hand. He is most probably a priest celebrating Mass. The lower part of the figure has been cut away to accommodate the two confronted figures. The feet of the priest are still visible between the two figures, which shows that they were superimposed on the image of the cleric. The recarved image is similar to the upper panel of Halton 1A but with a few important modifications. The left figure is raising his left hand towards his mouth/face and in his right hand he is holding a round object. The other figure is sitting on a chair and seems to have a zoomorphic head. The two figures are either Sigurd and Regin (Davidson 1950: 129; Pattison 1973: 230; Lang 1976a: 89, 1976b: 88, and 1991: 193) or St Paul and St Anthony breaking bread in the desert (Margeson 1980: 191; Bailey 1980: 122).⁴³ The scene has been identified by Pattison as Sigurd in the smithy at the forging of the magic sword. According to Lang (1976b: 89), it is more likely to be the eating of the dragon's heart cut into a ring-shaped slice, as is also suggested by the sucking of the thumb (indicated by the raised hand). I concur with Lang, although it needs to be noted that according to the literary sources Sigurd and Regin do not actually share a meal. Furthermore, Regin's zoomorphic head is unusual, and it is not supported by literary evidence. (On the other hand, if Oehrl's interpretation (2009b: 551) is correct, Wayland is depicted with a zoomorphic head (bird) on the rune stone of Ardre III.) There is a comparable depiction on the side of a slab at Govan on the Clyde (Glasgow), where an animal-headed human is sitting on a chair and facing a thumb-sucking figure (Lang 1976b: 89), but it does not provide a conclusive enough clue to interpret the Nunburnholme carving.⁴⁴

The recarving of the image of a priest celebrating Mass while leaving much of his body well visible might suggest a deliberate connection between the old and the new carvings. Paul and Anthony's breaking bread is a symbol of the Mass or the Eucharist, which would explain the link with the original carving of a priest.

the present discussion. The third sculptor only carved the intrusive image of a centaur on side A (Lang 1976a: 76–82). The figure at the top of face B is perhaps the work of a fourth hand involved (Lang 1991: 192).

⁴³ The Kirklevington carvings (nos 4A and 16C), depicting confronting profile beasts or figures with animal heads, have also been associated with the Temptation of St Anthony (Lang 2001: 149).

⁴⁴ Animal-headed figures are also found on Kirklevington 4A and Baldersby 1C (maybe also Kirklevington 16C) in Yorkshire. Lang considered them Irish motifs (2001: 144).

Sigurd's mystic meal also contains a central element that corresponds to the Eucharist, namely the acquiring of knowledge through blood.⁴⁵

The depiction of Sigurd's meal, together with Fafnir's slaying and Regin's death, is also found on a fragmented cross shaft from Kirby Hill (no. 2, Northern Yorkshire) (Figure 15). The tenth-century shaft is now built into the south wall of the nave, thus only one face is visible. In the lower right corner are remains of two loops, probably part of a dragon's body. Above it there is a figure with his hand raised towards his mouth, next to it a tapering block with a flat top, and above it a decapitated body. At the top of the shaft, separated from the lower panel by a moulding, are the feet of Christ from a Crucifixion scene, which probably formed the lower part of the original cross head. While Margeson (1980: 191) dismissed the shaft as iconographically illegible, its images have been identified by Lang as depicting Sigurd's meal, the decapitated Regin, and the slain Fafnir. According to Lang (1976b: 90), who interpreted the tapering object in front of Sigurd as an anvil, here we might face a further example of mixing the iconographies of the Wayland and Sigurd stories, because Regin's head was not struck off in a smithy. It is more likely, however, that the tapering object represents the fire of the heart-roasting scene, thus the decapitated body of Regin is not misplaced.

The same Yorkshire site produced another Sigurd carving, now lost (Kirby Hill 9) (Figure 16). The iconography of this fragment of a grave marker, missing by 1974, is only known from an illustration from 1870 (Rowe 1870: 241, fig. 7). On face A Rowe's drawing shows part of an L-shaped knotted dragon whose body is pierced by a sword from the left, but there is no human figure. The scene clearly resembles Scandinavian depictions of the killing of Fafnir, thus in the Sigurd context the figure of a horse in profile on the reverse side (C) has been identified by Lang (1976b: 86) as Grani even though it lacks the treasure chest

⁴⁵ The rest of the cross's iconography is unrelated to the Sigurd story (see Lang 1991: 189–93). The upper fragment (a) of face D has a profile beast in a semicircular frame above an arch. In the arched panel there is a frontal figure of a saint with a halo. The upper part (a) of face A shows a seated swordsman in a helmet, while the upper half of the lower fragment (b) of the same side displays a seated cleric in profile (head missing), holding a book in his left hand. The lower half of the panel has been defaced to accommodate the intrusive carving of a centaur with a child on its back. Fragment a of face B has a frontal hooded figure with a large rectangle on her chest, probably an abbess, while the lower fragment shows a beast-chain of large profile animals. The upper half (a) of face C depicts the Virgin and Child in half-profile. Their heads are framed by halos, and Christ is holding a book in his hand. The lower fragment (b) shows a large frontal figure (head missing) with two birds on his shoulders, probably in the act of benediction: he is resting his hands on the heads of two smaller seated figures below. Sculptural analogues of the scene are found on the Halton cross and on York Minster 2A (Lang 1976a: 89), and it also vaguely resembles the design on the recarved lower fragment of face D.



Figure 15. Fragment of upper part of cross shaft, Kirby Hill (no. 2A), Northern Yorkshire. First half of tenth century. Photo: Derek Craig. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.



Figure 16. Part of grave cover, Kirby Hill (nos 9A and C), Northern Yorkshire. Lost, missing by 1974. Late ninth to mid-tenth century. After Rowe 1870. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

(similarly to the horse of the Halton cross, Figure 13). It is interesting to note that the two Kirby Hill fragments depict different episodes of the Sigurd story, which seems to point to a broad pictorial tradition of the story known in the region. The frontal face of a fragmented cross head found in the north transept of Ripon Cathedral (Ripon 4A, Western Yorkshire) shows a further possible example of carvings related to (but not necessarily part of) the Sigurd iconography (Figure 17). In the upper cross arm there is a seated or crouching figure in profile,

with one hand raised to his face and the other extended in front of him. The figure has been identified by Lang (1976b: 86; 1977) as Sigurd sucking his thumb. Lang also recognized the remains of the dead Fafnir in the carving of the adjacent lateral arm, but it is far from being identifiable. Margeson (1980: 190) questioned the Sigurd identification altogether and pointed to affinities of the crouching figure with orants and devotees (or indeed prophets) in similar positions on Celtic crosses (cf. the cross of SS Patrick and Columba at Kells, or the cross from Drumhallagh, Donegal). Similarly, in an undoubtedly Christian context, standing thumb-sucking figures are flanking a cross on a sixth-century belt buckle from Echallens-Les Condemines (see Watt 2004: fig. 34g). The thumb-sucking gesture probably had its origins in pre-Christian Germanic and Celtic cultural contexts: in Celtic mythology it is associated with Finn Mac Cumail as a gesture of foresight, while in an early Germanic context it appears, independent of the Sigurd iconography, on Migration Period gold bracteates (Skovlund, Lelling-B, Penzlin-B), fibulae, and gold figure foils (*guldgubbar*) (Uppåkra, Sorte Muld) (see Watt 2004: 184–86; 207–08; figs 17 and 34). Following H. R. Ellis Davidson (1989: 74), Watt (2004: 206–08) interpreted the gesture as that of prophecy, foresight, or ‘second sight’ (therefore sometimes referred to as the ‘seer’s thumb’). Since images of Sigurd in England are normally confined to the cross shaft (cf. Halton, Nunburnholme, Kirby Hill), the positioning of the figure of Ripon 4 on the cross head, usually reserved for strictly Christian representations, indicates a strong link with the Christian use of the thumb-sucking figure, although a reference to Sigurd’s second sight may have been easily recognized in the image. Elizabeth Coatsworth’s (2008: 236) understanding of the fragment as being a side arm instead of the upper arm turns the figure ninety degrees and suggests that it is in a kneeling rather than crouching position, which makes the Sigurd interpretation even less probable.

The Sigurd iconography was by no means limited to crosses. A large, flat grave slab, found in situ above burial 7 at York Minster (no. 34, York, tenth century), suggests the significance of the Sigurd myth in a commemorative and funerary context. The monument shows various episodes of the Sigurd story on two of its faces. On the long side of the slab (face D) a figure with bent knees is depicted in profile, holding a sword, and fighting two gaping, knotted, serpentine beasts (Figure 18). According to Lang (1991: 71), at the feet of the human figure is the severed head of a dragon, an observation that is hard to verify. Even though a depiction with two beasts is rather unusual, the scene might be related to Sigurd’s killing of Fafnir, since the position of the human figure’s legs is similar to the depictions of Sigurd in the pit (see, for example, Ramsundberget, Gök, Drävle, and the later Hylestad portal). The two dragons also appear on the carvings of



Figure 17. Fragment of cross head, Ripon (no. 4A), Western Yorkshire. Late ninth to early tenth century. Photo: Ken Jukes and Derek Craig. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

Ramsundberget, judging by the two heads of the serpentine frame (Lang 1976b: 83). At the bottom of the worn top face (A) of the grave slab an S-shaped dragon (the dead Fafnir?) lies in a heap; above it there is a triangle (fire), below a horizontal bar, and on the side a human figure with his hand raised to his mouth (Figure 19). The scene has been identified by Lang as the heart-roasting scene on the basis of its similarity with the Manx stones and Yorkshire crosses (1976b: 84). Opposite Sigurd is a headless torso that can be interpreted as Regin. Above it the horse Grani is depicted in profile, and lastly a very worn figure, who remains unidentified, stands between decorative borders.⁴⁶

Another funerary monument, a tenth-century hogback (no. 46) was discovered in the foundations of York Minster. It was accidentally destroyed (only reconstructed fragments remain), but fortunately a photograph of its gable end had previously been taken in situ. The lost vertical gable end displayed a frontal human being with spread arms, the elbows dipped (Figure 20). He was bound by snakes trying to bite him beneath the arm pits. The image reminds us of the Gunnar representations (so Lang 1991: 77), although the harp is missing, but so is the lower part of the body. Pattison (1973: 215) identified it as a Crucifixion scene, which can be justified by other insular and Scandinavian Crucifixion depictions where snakes or serpentine bands surround the body of Christ as well as by the positioning of the image at the gable end of the hogback. An intended overlap between the human figure fighting with snakes or beasts and the figure of Christ

⁴⁶ The other long side of the slab (B) is decorated with Anglo-Scandinavian-style interlace pattern, while face C (end) shows two profile animals in combat and another bear-like animal in profile.



Figure 18. Grave cover of burial 7 from York Minster (no. 34D), Northern Yorkshire.
York, Yorkshire Museum. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas.
Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.



Figure 19. Grave cover of burial 7 from York Minster (no. 34A), Northern Yorkshire.
York, Yorkshire Museum. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas.
Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

is also possible (Bailey 1980: 139; Lang 1991: 77–78). Human figures with raised arms and surrounded by snakes also feature on a group of contemporary carvings from the vicinity of Masham in Wensleydale (Northern Yorkshire), all products of the Lower Wensleydale workshop (Masham 3, Coverham 1, Thornton Steward 2, Spennithorne 1) (Lang 2001: 49–50). Some of the figures in question are naked (with well visible genitals on Masham 3A and C and Thornton Steward 2A). These images depict the punished souls in hell, similarly to the pre-Viking Rothbury cross (Kopár 2008). A similar interpretation cannot be completely excluded in the case of the York Minster hogback considering the funerary function of the monument, but the lower part of the figure that may have provided conclusive evidence is missing. Based on the evidence of contemporary burial and penitential practices, Victoria Thompson offered a different interpretation of the



Figure 20. Hogback fragment from York Minster (no. 46B), Northern Yorkshire. York, Yorkshire Museum. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

Masham carvings and argued that the naked figures are to be identified as corpses surrounded by *wyrmas* (worms), representing the vulnerability of men after death and making a plea for intercessory prayer on behalf of the dead (2004: 152–56). At Heysham in Lancashire a tenth-century hogback (no. 5, now inside St Peter's Church) may provide us with a further example of the use of the legend of the Völsungs in a commemorative context. The unusually large hogback was unearthed in the churchyard between 1807 and 1811. According to local accounts, a human skeleton and a spearhead were found underneath it, which makes it the only surviving hogback directly associated with a burial (Bailey 2010: 201–02). The long sides of the monument, clasped between two four-legged end beasts, are decorated with extraordinary figural carvings. Side C shows a man with raised hands in the centre, to the left a stylized tree surrounded by three birds (two on the left, one on the right), and a quadruped (probably a canine) with another animal above on the far left. On the right hand side, next to the central figure, there is a horse with a small triangle (burden or saddle) on his back, followed by a second quadruped with a curled tail (Figure 21). The carving has been identified by Davidson (1950: 131), Lang (1976b: 86), Cramp (1994: 115), and Ewing (2003: 12–15) as a depiction of the Sigurd legend based on the presence of a tree, birds, and a horse with a burden (Grani). Margeson, Bailey, and Düwel have been sceptical about this interpretation. Margeson (1980: 191) considered it a simple hunt scene, similar to the image on the other broad face of the monument, while Bailey argued that if we interpret the carving as part of the Sigurd iconography, 'we stray near the frontiers of credibility, for there is no trace of either serpent or thumb-sucking' (1980: 121; similarly Düwel 1986: 263 and Bailey 2010: 203). In fact, there may indeed be a serpent: as Thor Ewing has recently pointed out, a 'bulbous lump' which interrupts the zigzag roof-tile pattern right above the tree 'has the appearance of a serpent's head [with a mouth] and forms part of



Figure 21. Hogback, Heysham (no. 5C), Lancashire. Tenth century. Photo: John Miller.

a continuous ribbon which encircles the entire scene' (2003: 13), similarly to the Ramsundberget and Gök stones, as well as to other Cumbrian hogbacks at Lowther, Penrith, and Cross Canonby (cf. Bailey 2010: 203). To the left of its head a faint line may indicate the tail of the serpent, closing the circle, the bottom part of which is missing. Ewing also noted the possibility of the presence of a sword in the right hand of the central figure, Sigurd (which I cannot recognize), and a symbolic reference to Regin's treachery in the wolf-like creature on the far left. Although the latter observations are highly doubtful, the carvings on side C indeed seem to depict the story of young Sigurd.

The other side of the hogback (A; Figure 22) is more problematic. In the centre the carving shows a hart with a quadruped (hound?) on its back, flanked by two outward-facing beasts with extremely long tails. Above each long-tailed beast there is another quadruped, one crouching (left), one upside down (right). On the far left and right two pairs of human figures appear with raised hands as if supporting the decorated upper arch (the 'roof' of the hogback). Above the left side of the carving, in the upper arch, there is a smaller panel with a lying human figure and a quadruped facing his feet. Ewing saw the key to the interpretation of the whole scene in this carving which he interpreted as Sigmund (Sigurd's father) and the she-wolf. This early episode of the Völsung legend is documented in the *Völsunga saga* as follows: Being taken prisoners, Sigmund and his nine brothers were clamped in stocks and left to be eaten by wolves in the forest. Sigmund managed to escape by tricking the she-wolf that had systematically killed his brothers: a servant sent by Sigmund's sister, Signy, smeared honey on his face and mouth, and when the she-wolf tried to lick it off, he bit off its tongue and killed it. Although there are several visual representations of various episodes of the Völsung legend from Scandinavia as well as England, no other image of this particular story survives — unless we accept Martin Biddle's interpretation of Winchester Old Minster 88A, a carving known as the 'Sigmund relief' (for a dis-



Figure 22. Hogback, Heysham (no. 5A), Lancashire. Tenth century. Photo: John Miller.

cussion and counter-arguments, see below). To strengthen his argument, Ewing also tried to integrate into the Sigmund iconography the two pairs of human figures as Sigmund's brothers, the 'coiled snake' (a twisted double-line above the second pair of figures) as the snake that Signy's sons have to knead into a loaf, and the hound above the hart as the hero in wolf-skin (2003: 8–12). While an interpretation of the two faces of the hogback as representations of the extended Völsung legend, the stories of father and son (if that was indeed the insular version),⁴⁷ is tempting, Ewing's interpretation is just as uncertain as March's allegorical reading of the carving as a Ragnarök scene with Vidar-Christ, the divine hart (1891: 78). An interesting connection between Sigurd and the hunted stag as a metaphor of death has been suggested by Emil Ploss (1966: 109–11). In the *Völsunga saga* and *Fáfnismál* Sigurd is called *göfugt dýr*, 'splendid deer, noble beast or stag', and in *Guðrúnarkviða II* he is compared with the 'hiortr hábeinn um hvössom dýrom' (st. 2, 'high-antlered hart among the keen beasts'). Although the parallel is tempting, I doubt these later kennings are relevant for the interpretation of this monument, since the association with the stag could simply refer to the noble nature of a man in general, and the hart-and-hound motif had a wide circulation in the British Isles independent of the Sigurd iconography. An alternative reading of the four figures was offered by Davidson (1988: 174; similarly Bailey 2010: 203) as the four dwarves supporting the sky in the pagan Norse cosmology.

⁴⁷ The figure of Sigmund was definitely known in Anglo-Saxon England (cf. the digression in *Beowulf*, 874–97), but the insular version of his legend is unattested. It is also interesting to note that the story of Sigmund and the she-wolf is unique to the *Völsunga saga* and may thus be the invention or addition of a later Icelandic author. Of course, the story may have been based on oral legends also known in Anglo-Saxon England, but there is no surviving evidence to prove this hypothesis.



Figure 23. Cross shaft, Crowle (no. 1A), Lincolnshire. Early to mid-tenth century. Photo: Judy O'Neill. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

Several images on the monument may also lend themselves to (or at least are not in contrast with) a Christian interpretation. On side C, a paradisaical Tree of Life with a man in orans position surrounded by animals may suggest Adam naming the animals. Similarly, the four orans figures and the hart-and-hound motif of side A are also possible elements of a Christian imagery (Bailey 2010: 203), although they do not necessarily add up to a coherent iconography. Finally, side A may simply be a secular image depicting a hunt scene, with a possible link to the hart-and-hound motif that appears in various iconographical contexts on a large number of Anglo-Scandinavian stone monuments from Yorkshire to Cumbria. Admittedly, the gestures of the four figures with both hands raised⁴⁸ and the absence of weapons seem to speak against a hunt scene (unless the men are the hunted). If it is a stag hunt, it may function as a reference to the high social standing of the commemorated individual, accompanied by a visual praise of the heroic qualities of his character through the Sigurd imagery.

The last monument of northern origin, the cross shaft of Crowle (no. 1) in Lincolnshire, lacks most of the characteristic features of Sigurd iconography, and its present location falls outside of the main distribution area of Sigurd carvings, although the stone type

⁴⁸ The gesture of raised hands appears on numerous early Germanic bracteates, belt buckles, and fibulae from the Continent and is believed to represent divine epiphany or adoration by worshippers (Watt 2004: 205 and fig. 33).

strongly suggests that the carving may have been produced in York (Everson and Stocker 1999: 151). Only side A of the cross shaft contains figural carvings; the rest is decorated with complex Scandinavian-style interlace (Figure 23). On the top two birds are flying towards a small disc; between their tails is a larger, flower-like disc. Below them is a facing pair of men in profile. Their prominent beards, knee-length attires, and postures suggest that they are secular figures. Each figure raises one leg as if stepping or marching. The man on the right is grasping the hilt of a sword in his side. Below the pair is a bearded horseman in profile, facing right, with an irregular oval or circle behind his back. Beneath the rider is an arched ribbon with a fragmentary runic inscription. Although the artistic style of the monument is undoubtedly Scandinavian and the inscription is laid out in a Norse fashion (in a rune band), the text is in Old English and is written in Anglo-Saxon runes. It contains the Old English word *bæcun*, 'beacon, monument', or possibly *licbæcun*, 'corpse-monument, gravestone', which explains the function of the monument (D. N. Parsons in Everson and Stocker 1999: 148–50). The figural carvings of side A have been interpreted variously. Everson and Stocker (1999: 151) favour a secular interpretation but do not rule out the possibility that the carvings are parts of a coherent narrative. If so, the images are likely to depict the Sigurd story including (from top to bottom) the birds that tell about Regin's treachery, the encounter of Sigurd and Regin, Sigurd on his horse Grani, and Fafnir (symbolized by the rune band) (Everson and Stocker 1999: 151). The secular interpretation seems indeed more likely since the monument lacks all the typical diagnostic features of insular Sigurd carvings (stabbing the serpent, roasting Fafnir's heart, thumb licking, the headless Regin), while there are parallels for the secular warriors and the horseman, for example, at Sockburn (Co. Durham; further see Chapter 3).

The So-Called 'Sigmund Relief' of Winchester

In 1965 Martin Biddle's excavations in Winchester Old Minster brought to light a weathered fragment of a frieze that has been claimed to represent the sole southern English example of a visual rendering in stone of the Völsung legend (Figure 24). The carving (Winchester Old Minster 88A, Hampshire) is decorated (in its fragmented form) with two human figures and a dog or wolf. On the left there remain the body, one arm, and two legs of a figure in chainmail, with a large sword on his side. He is turning his back and walking away from a second figure who is lying on his back with his hands raised next to his head. A band or tether is tied around his neck and one hand; the other hand appears



Figure 24. Fragment of figural frieze from Winchester Old Minster (no. 88A), Hampshire. Winchester, Winchester City Museum. Between c. 980/993–94 and 1093–94. Photo: P. M. J. Crook. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

to be free. Above him is a canine whose tongue and paw are touching his face, as if licking it. In his description of the carving Biddle insists that the beast is not biting, although his teeth are clearly shown (Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 315–16). Instead, his tongue, ‘although partly broken away, [...] crosses the gap between the animal’s muzzle and the man’s face and descends in a curve up to, and apparently into, the man’s open mouth’ (Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 316). The surviving fragment, which originally extended in all four directions, may have been part of a single narrative scene or depicted two adjacent scenes (or stories) in a longer narrative sequence.

Biddle himself identified the image as a depiction of the story of Sigmund and the she-wolf as recorded in the *Völsunga saga* (1966: 329–32; Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 317–21). As we have seen above, Ewing suggested that the same story was depicted on the Heysham hogback (5A). His interpretation is not only uncertain in the context of the Heysham monument, but the two carvings are clearly dissimilar in terms of iconography (as well as in style and monument

type). In spite of all uncertainties that surround the Sigmund interpretation of the carving, Richard Bailey not only accepted Biddle's interpretation but hoped for the existence of many more of its kind and deduced that 'the major church of late Anglo-Saxon England [Winchester Old Minster] was boldly decorated with images of non-Christian narrative' (1996a: 95–96).

The carving poses several questions and problems (uncertain dating, lack of comparanda, and non-conforming details) that may undermine its interpretation as a depiction of Sigmund. George Zarnecki, among others, voiced his concerns in a catalogue description of the carving in 1984 (Zarnecki, Holt, and Holland 1984: 150–51), but offered no alternative reading.

Biddle's interpretation rests partially on dating. The archaeological context sets the terminus post quem *c.* 980, when the building of the eastern part of Old Minster began (dedicated in 993–94), and the terminus ante quem 1093–94, when the Anglo-Saxon church was demolished as part of a Norman building campaign and the carving got buried in the rubble. Within this time range, Biddle argued for an early eleventh-century dating of the carving and suggested that it was commissioned by the Anglo-Danish king Cnut (1016–35) to commemorate the shared ancestry of the Danish and English royal houses in the form of a long narrative frieze either on a screen or on the inside or outside of the cathedral (Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 317–18). However, the Völsungs were not directly part of these royal genealogies (Bailey 1996a: 96), although they belonged to the same legendary-heroic past. Therefore, Bailey's alternative suggestion to explain the function of a pre-Christian heroic image (if it is one) in the context of Cnut's reign seems more likely; the carving may have been intended as a 'visible statement of the great ideals of the past, which the present generation should strive to equal' (Bailey 1996a: 96). Such interpretation would shift the focus from the pagan origin of the legend towards its moral-ethical qualities, which are, admittedly, less obvious in the given episode, and make this secular image more acceptable as church decoration. Alexander's suggestion (1987: 6) that the carving was possibly intended as a decoration for a secular hall or palace in Winchester rather than for the Minster was rejected by the Biddles on archaeological grounds (Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 319). The fact that the Old Minster was the final resting place of a number of kings, including Cnut himself as well as his son Harthacnut (d. 1042) and wife Emma (d. 1052), creates a plausible funerary or commemorative context for the carving which would not be unusual for the Völsung iconography.

The problem with Biddle's dating to Cnut's reign is that it is based largely on the questionable 'Scandinavian' iconography of the carving (and on the fact that it was already somewhat weathered when buried in the rubble) and not on art

historical or documentary evidence. In its stylistic elements the carving shows much closer affinity to the Bayeux Tapestry (*c.* 1070) and Romanesque carvings than to early eleventh-century insular sculptural traditions (Dodwell 1982: 138; Zarnecki, Holt, and Holland 1984: 151; Wilson 1985: 206–08). It also lacks any evidence, at least in stylistic terms, of Scandinavian taste in southern England (as opposed to Bailey 1996a: 96), unlike, for example, the group of Ringerike-style carvings from the greater London region (including London St Paul's 1, All Hallows by the Tower 3, and City 1; Rochester 2 and 3 (Kent); and Great Canfield 1 (Essex)) (Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 87–88). If the early archaeological dating and these stylistic discrepancies were to be reconciled, it would place the advent of Romanesque style in England well before the Norman Conquest (Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 320).

Based on visual parallels from later bestiaries produced in England, Jonathan Alexander (1987) proposed an alternative, though equally hypothetical, reading of the sculpture as the king of the Garamantes rescued by his dogs. In medieval bestiaries the Garamantes story featured as an example for the faithfulness of dogs. According to the story, the king was captured by his enemies and rescued by two hundred of his dogs that fought with his captors. In illustrated exemplars the enemies appear as armoured knights, the king is depicted with his hands bound, flanked by two of his captors, and the dogs are attacking, usually ready to bite the chest, neck, or face of the enemies. The compositional elements of these illustrations in a number of Latin bestiaries of late twelfth- and thirteenth-century English origin are indeed similar to those of the Winchester carving, especially the men in chainmail, the bound figure, and an attacking dog (or dogs) depicted in the same position. Based on these similarities Alexander suggested the following reading of the Winchester relief: the figure in chainmail on the left would be one of the soldiers arresting the king while the prostrate figure with the canine beast is one of the king's enemies attacked by a dog. The carving is thus depicting two succeeding events in 'hinge composition', that is, juxtaposing the (separate) scenes of arrest and rescue. The closest parallel is the Rochester Bestiary (London, British Library, MS Royal 12 F. xiii, fol. 30^v), dated *c.* 1230, but the scene also appears in earlier manuscripts. The earliest example is in a bestiary of *c.* 1170 (London, British Library, MS Additional 11283, fol. 10), which admittedly still leaves a gap of a century or more between the carving and the manuscript images. The story of the dogs appears in earlier Latin bestiary manuscripts from England (one of which, London, British Library, MS Stowe 1076 is *c.* 1120) but without illustrations. An examination of the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century images of the Garamantes story suggests, according to Alexander, a corruption of the pictorial tradition already at that date which resulted in the misunderstanding and

conflation of the visual representations of two different stories, the Garamantes story and that of the faithful dog that recognized and attacked his master's murderer (Alexander 1987: 2–4). This suggests the existence of earlier, uncorrupted models of continuous narrative from possibly as early as the Late Antique or Carolingian periods although no evidence survives to support this claim.

While the Garamantes reading can accommodate both human figures as representing the events of arrest and rescue (unlike the Sigmund interpretation that rests solely upon the prostrate figure attacked by the canine and has to assume that the other figure is part of a different episode of the story), Alexander's interpretation cannot account for one detail. If the prostrate figure is indeed one of the enemies attacked by a dog, why is he bound, and why is he not in chainmail like the other enemy figure? Could it be a different moment of the rescue scene, not the attack on the enemies as illustrated in the bestiaries but the freeing of the arrested and bound king?

Within the realm of more traditional church decorations, Jolanta Zaluska suggested a biblical reading of the image as that of the dogs licking the blood of Naboth, stoned on the order of Jezebel (1 Kings 21. 19) (in Zarnecki 1986: 25, n. 7; Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 318). Alternatively, Biddle himself (Tweddle, Biddle, and Kjølbye-Biddle 1995: 317) mentions the possibility of a scene from a saint's life, but without offering a name. In my opinion, St Dunstan may be a likely candidate in that context. According to his early biographers (Auctor B, Osbern, and Eadmer), on one occasion the saint was attacked by his political enemies and thrown into a cistern or filthy fen with his hands and feet fettered. He was rescued or affectionately protected by dogs against human attackers, which prompted the saint to reflect on the canine cruelty of his human attackers in contrast with the humane affection of the dogs (see Stubbs 1874: 12–13, 81, and 172 for Auctor B, Osbern, and Eadmer respectively). Given St Dunstan's connection to Winchester through his uncle Ælfheah, bishop of Winchester, who ordained him (soon after the incident with the dogs), and his involvement in royal politics, a depiction of an episode of his life may not be out of place in the context of the minster. However, no visual depiction of the scene survives that could offer a definite clue. The carving thus remains unparalleled both iconographically and in sculptural terms as being part of an extended coherent sculptural frieze from the eleventh century (Wilson 1985: 208). As for the ultimate interpretation of the image and its function, we are left in the dark until the emergence of further comparative material.

Sigurd in the Anglo-Scandinavian Context

The Völsung legend as a whole consists of two distinguishable parts: a mythological story and a semi-historical story with historic characters. The breaking point in the legend is Sigurd's encounter with the valkyrie. It is possible that there were several independent stories which were later joined together to form the long saga of the Völsungs: the mythological origin of the gold (the otter episode), Sigurd slaying the dragon, Sigurd's encounter with the valkyrie, and the semi-historical Burgundian episode (the events at Gjuki's court, the story of Gudrun). The earliest evidence of joining all these episodes in one narrative sequence comes from twelfth-century and later Scandinavian literary sources and wood carvings. Therefore, it is hard to tell whether all episodes were known and considered part of the same legend in the British Isles before the Conquest. On the basis of the Manx stone monuments we can postulate the following elements as parts of the legend by the end of the tenth century: the otter's killing (the onset of the story of the cursed gold), Regin the smith and his treachery, the slaying of the dragon (from a pit), the roasting of the dragon's heart (and Sigurd licking his thumb and thereby learning about Regin's treachery), Grani the horse, and possibly the death of Gunnar in a snake pit. The first definite linking of the story of Sigurd with Gunnar in the snake pit occurs on the Andreas stone slab from the Isle of Man.

We noted above the possible mingling of the Wayland and the Sigurd stories on the basis of the carvings from Halton and Kirby Hill, where a decapitated body appears in a smithy, although Regin's head was not struck off there. In this context the smithy was either depicted as an attribute in order to help identify the body as that of a smith, or the iconographical pattern was simply borrowed from the Wayland depictions (based on the visual correspondence) where the headless bodies of the princes were lying in the smithy. What we have here might be the borrowing of an established iconographical pattern for expressing a similar narrative episode — a common incidence in the history of art and iconography. This may prove an association of the two legends with each other, probably because they both go back to a common heroic proto-narrative and thus share a number of similar episodes and narrative features. Since we have no contemporary insular narrative sources to reconstruct the versions of the two legends as known in Anglo-Saxon England, the extent of overlap and parallels remains uncertain.

The surviving depictions of the Völsung legend can be grouped around two figures, Sigurd and Gunnar, representing the two halves of the story. (The two proposed Sigmund carvings at Heysham and Winchester, if accepted as such, would form a third thematic group, uniquely insular, but I consider the Sigmund interpretation of both images highly unlikely.) Early representations

of a man amongst snakes, if we can ever be certain about their meaning, seem to focus on Gunnar in the snake pit, although this episode may have occupied a different position in the cycle or belonged to a separate narrative altogether (not necessarily of Gunnar). Viking-Age carvings from England concentrate on the figure of Sigurd, highlighting a few significant scenes of the story: Regin in the smithy, the killing of Fafnir, the roasting and eating of the dragon's heart, the birds on the tree, and the beheading of Regin. The selection of these scenes suggests that in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities the first half of the Sigurd story was favoured. It would be conjectural to claim that the selection was made on the basis of possible Christian parallels, but interestingly enough some of the favoured scenes have easily found counterparts in the Christian lore.

The most frequent parallel, and favourite theme of later tympana, is that of Sigurd the dragonslayer figuring as the pre-Christian counterpart of St Michael (Ellis 1942b; Lang 1976b; Bailey 1980: 124–25; Düwel 1986: 264–65; Byock 1990; Bailey 1996a: 93). St Michael's struggle with the Serpent of the Apocalypse is also paralleled by the encounter of Thor and the Midgard serpent, and later most notably by St George and the dragon. In this context Sigurd appears as a Christian soldier (*miles Christi*) and symbolic protector, and his heroic deed symbolizes the victory of good over evil (the latter in the form of a dragon or serpent). The Eucharistic scene on the Nunburnholme cross recarved with a scene depicting the meal of Sigurd and Regin possibly suggests an intended comparison between the Eucharistic meal and Sigurd's mystic meal with the miracle of the blood, which also functions as a kind of initiation where special knowledge is gained.⁴⁹ The birds on the tree form part of the episode of the mystic meal, where the language of the birds might symbolize 'the prophetic element, the revelation of spiritual secrets' (Lindholm 1969: 57). The central role of the tree as source of knowledge, indicated by its prominent position on some of the carvings, recalls the tree in the Garden of Eden, but this may lead us too far from credibility.⁵⁰ A further possible Christian parallel is related to the second half of the story, and that is the overlap between Gunnar and the snakes and Christ's struggle with serpentine beasts, or an association of the same image with that of tortured souls in hell. In the latter case the parallel is more visual than ideological.

⁴⁹ The only disturbing element in this interpretation is the implied parallel between the blood of the evil Fafnir and that of Christ the Saviour.

⁵⁰ Düwel (1986: 271, n. 189) noted a neglected detail of the iconography of the tree at Ramsundberget and Gök: a serpent on the tree. While this element is unusual in Germanic art, it is common in the Christian iconography of the Fall of Man, which may suggest a visual echo of the Genesis story (see below).

By the twelfth century, the iconography of the Völsung legend was clearly acceptable in a Christian context as is demonstrated by the frequency of carvings related to the legend in Scandinavian churches. According to Byock (1990: 619), in Norway only three of the surviving stave church portals with narrative figural carvings depict biblical scenes; all other carvings show scenes of the Sigurd legend. Some scholars deny the fact that the images meant anything more for the Christian builders of these churches than traditional patterns of ornamentation in wood carving (Lindholm 1969: 47), but that is unlikely in the case of such highly symbolic buildings as churches. The same church portals inspired others to come up with overtly Christian interpretations where every element of the Völsung legend was given a Christian parallel. H. C. March (1891: 60–61), for example, gave a forcefully Christianized reading of the Völsung depictions on Norwegian church portals. He saw the function of these carvings in scaring away demons by representing Sigurd the dragon slayer as a Christian soldier. For him the tree with the birds was undoubtedly the Tree of Knowledge, Grani, the riderless horse, Christ's palfrey, a symbol of the Redeemer's death, and Gunnar's snake pit a representation of hell. The positioning of the heroic protector at the most vulnerable spot of a sacred space, the church door, certainly suggests that the choice of iconography was deliberate and meaningful. By this stage the figure of Sigurd had lost its pagan association and became elevated to a heroic character who not only belonged to the worthy ancestors of the royal family but exhibited morals compatible with Christianity.

Certain narrative parallels with the Old Testament Genesis prompted further interpretations of the legend on typological principles. Lindholm identified in the story of the Völsungs 'a story of the Fall, in which the gold stands for the tree of knowledge', and suggested a relation between the exterior and interior of these stave churches similar to that of the Old Testament and the New Testament, which would relate the Völsung legend to the Old Testament (1969: 48–49).⁵¹ This is in opposition to Joseph Harris's observation that the arrangement of the Codex Regius manuscript of the *Poetic Edda* into two parts, 'deeply imbued with a sense of history as a succession of ages', reflects a conscious imitation of the bipartite structure of the Bible (1996: 120). According to this division, the lays of the Völsung legend (contained in the second half of the manuscript) would correspond to the New Testament, offering a parallel between Sigurd,

⁵¹ All in all, Lindholm gives a psychological (or psychoanalytical) reading of the story where Fafnir (half-dragon, half-human) appears as the animalistic side of the human soul, the treacherous Regin as the cold reason and intellect, and Sigurd as the individual hero who stands between them (cf. Lindholm 1969: 46–64).

the foremost hero, and Christ (Rowe 2006: 189). In connection with the insular carvings specifically, James Lang suggested a link between the Sigurd story and Genesis on the basis of common iconographical elements:

One possibility is that the Sigurd cycle overlaps with Genesis, for in iconographical terms the elements have much in common: serpent, the act of eating and the tree. Regin acts the tempter and he is brother to the serpent who is questioned about eschatology when killed by Sigurd [*Fáfnismál*, 10–15]. Secondly, both Sigurd and Adam eat illicitly and gain knowledge thereby, and the tree inhabited by the informative birds often occupies a dominant position in the design. The result of eating the heart or the apple is the same for both: death. References to death in the iconography of funerary sculpture are only to be expected. (1976b: 94)

The possible association of the Sigurd iconography with funerary monuments initiated yet another trend in interpretation. W. G. Collingwood, following W. S. Calverley, interpreted the Sigurd carvings of northern England as some form of ancestry claim and suggested that Tostig, earl of Northumbria, who claimed ancestry from Sigurd, had a special influence on the spreading of the story (Bailey 1980: 122–23). But Tostig was not the only one who saw himself as a descendant of Sigurd, and the locations of the carvings suggest a much wider popularity than Tostig's landholdings and also in many cases an earlier date. According to R. Bailey, Sigurd's presence 'may represent some claim to a distinguished ancestry or it may be a conventional method of praising a dead man to compare him to a great hero of old' (1981: 86). The same use of the figure of Sigurd is implied on Scandinavian rune stones described above. This explanation is certainly valid (at least) for those monuments where no Christian parallel can be detected. But the more complex iconography of the Nunburnholme and Halton crosses suggests that there were at least in some cases either narrative or moral-ethical parallels recognized between Christianity and the Sigurd story. However, these two monuments may rather be the exceptions than the typical understanding of the Völsung legend in Anglo-Scandinavian England.

Originally the story of Sigurd (and the Völsungs) was centred around three motifs: gold (as is evident from references to the legend in kennings for gold/treasure), a fatal curse that leads to the downfall of heroes, and finally revenge that goes through the entire story like a guiding thread. Later the emphasis shifted away from these three organizing narrative elements, and the legend became the story of a heroic individual fighting against evil (centred around the dragon-killing scene), which fit the new Christian context better. It seems probable that the story of Sigurd lost its pagan association early on, and Sigurd became considered a historical character; thus his deeds (especially slaying the dragon)

were seen to be just as realistic and acceptable for the Christian audience as those of any saint. This is of course by no means to suggest that Sigurd was ever seen as a saint. Rather he embodied a heroic ideal of a successful individual that continued into the conversion period and beyond. His unquestionably entertaining and adventurous story also provided popular examples, as well as obvious narrative parallels, for the fight between good and evil, which made the legend not only popular, but also fitting in the new Christian cultural context.

CONFLICTS AND ADVERSARIES OF MYTHICAL DIMENSIONS

Evil Adversaries

Having examined the greatest legendary heroes, it is time to take a closer look at the adversaries, that is, the various representations of evil and depictions of the mythic struggle between good and evil. The overcoming of evil that endangers the cosmic balance is one of the central themes in many mythologies; thus it is the easiest concept to find parallels for in a newly encountered culture or religious system. As opposed to Christianity, Germanic mythology did not operate with the concepts of absolute good and absolute evil; therefore the contact with Christianity necessarily resulted in a certain degree of reinterpretation of these concepts and a shift of emphasis in the pagan narratives of encounter between these two forces.

In Norse mythology the natural adversaries of the gods from the beginning of mythic times are the giants whose existence counterbalances the power of the gods and creates a structural duality in the universe (cf. Larrington 2006: 541; Schulz 2004). The creation of the universe is made possible by the victory of the Æsir over the primeval giant Ymir, whose body is dismembered to create the physical world. At Ragnarök, the end of the created world, the clash between the giants and the gods constitutes the final battle for which the heroic inhabitants of Valhalla, the *einherjar*, have long been preparing.

Apart from the giants, there is a second set of adversaries who feature prominently in the mythological stories as the enemies of particular gods, and ultimately the Æsir in general. They are the monstrous children of Loki with the

giantess Angrboða: the Midgard serpent, Fenrir the wolf, and the goddess Hel.¹ In spite of their destructive eschatological roles, Loki's offspring are not typical adversaries. They are incarnations of metaphysical principles (Larrington 2006); they embody and mark, respectively, the spatial, temporal, and existential limits of human and divine existence and are therefore integral parts of the created world. The Midgard serpent encircles the habitat of gods and men, Fenrir personifies the limitations of time, and Hel guards the boundaries of life and death (Kopár 2010: 222–26). They are accommodated by the gods until Ragnarök, but their scopes of action are limited. The Midgard serpent and Fenrir are ultimately banished from Asgard because they directly endanger the existence of the gods, and Hel is entrusted by Odin to guard the underworld and is thus removed from the world of the living. The frightening presence of the former two demonic creatures is a portent of the instability of the world of the gods, and the gods' attempts to control them are all prequels leading up to the apocalypse. The breaking away of these monsters from their designated positions/roles marks the offset of balance. The fight between the gods and Loki and his offspring escalates at Ragnarök and leads to the destruction of the world of gods and men. Loki himself has a double role in this mythological system: he is accepted among the Æsir of Asgard, but ultimately it is his treachery that leads to the destruction of the gods and the created world. He features as both an adversary and an indispensable helper of the gods in various myths, he embodies a series of anti-functions that mirror and undermine the functions of the gods (Frakes 2002), and through his dual parentage he constitutes a link between the races of the Æsir and the giants. He is instrumental in both maintaining and destroying the cosmic balance.

The Midgard Serpent

In Norse mythology the serpentine enemy, a common feature of many cultures, appears in the form of the Midgard serpent. He is exiled from the community of gods and men and resides in the sea encircling the known world, thus representing

¹ Hel is different from the Midgard serpent and Fenrir in several ways. She does not have a dedicated adversary among the gods, she is the most human of the three in her appearance, and she is female. Her eschatological role is less obvious too. It is her abode (also called Hel) that seems to be of significance rather than her character: the beginning of Ragnarök is signalled by a rooster crowing in her hall (*Völuspá* 43), and men are marching on the road to Hel in *Völuspá* 47 and 52. The goddess Hel also lacks any identifiable iconographical representation, but judging by her role as a hostess, some of the cup-bearing female figures, usually identified as valkyries, may actually represent Hel as the hostess of the halls of the underworld (see below).

the spatial limits of human and divine existence. In the textual sources he is called *Jörmungandr*, ‘mighty monster’ and *Midgarðsormr*, ‘world serpent’ (of which the latter is a much younger term), and he is characterized in eddic and skaldic poetry as a poisonous nautical monster in the shape of a band — a cross-over between a fish and a serpentine dragon. The mythological and narrative role of the Midgard serpent is defined by his cosmic struggle with Thor, son of Odin and the giantess Jörd. Thor is the strongest of the Æsir, a fierce adversary of giants and protector of the gods. Three encounters are reported between Thor and the serpent in the literary sources. The first one is only mentioned by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* 46–47. It happens at the giant Útgarðaloki’s palace in the form of a contest of strength, where, as one of the impossible tasks, Thor is challenged to lift up a large grey cat, in vain, which turns out to be the Midgard serpent in disguise.

The second encounter occurs during Thor’s famous fishing adventure with the giant Hymir. The story is known from a number of literary and visual sources (for the latter see below), yet the outcome and minor details of the adventure are uncertain. The most detailed accounts are provided by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* 48 and in the *Hymiskviða* of the *Poetic Edda*. Further, the story is referenced five times in skaldic poetry: in *Ragnarsdrápa* 14–19 by Bragi Boddason the Old (mid-ninth century), in *Húsdrápa* 4–6 by Úlfr Uggason (late tenth century), and in verses by Ölvir hnúfa (ninth century), Gamli gnæfaðarskáld (tenth century), and Eysteinn Valdason (c. 1000). It also appears, with a euhemeristic interpretation as a battle between Hector and Achilles, in *Skáldskaparmál* 1 in Snorri’s *Prose Edda*. In *Gylfaginning* the story directly follows the Útgarðaloki episode, while the eddic lay presents Thor’s fishing for the Midgard serpent as part of an expedition to acquire a valuable object from the giants, a large cauldron to brew beer for the gods. In both cases the encounter between Thor and the serpent is a typical trial of strength in the context of Thor’s encounters with giants. The basic storyline is as follows: After acquiring an ox head for bait, Thor and the giant Hymir row far out into the world sea in a boat to catch the Midgard serpent. It bites on the ox-head bait and pulls heavily on the fishing line. God and monster stare at each other fiercely, and Thor manages to pull the monster up to the gunwale by pushing his foot (or feet) through the bottom of the boat. However, in the decisive moment the frightened Hymir cuts the fishing line and the serpent sinks back into the sea. So far the sources largely agree, with minor variations only; the fate of the monster is, however, uncertain. According to Snorri’s accounts, it survives the encounter to return at Ragnarök, while others suggest that it suffers a lethal blow by Thor’s hammer. Even though the uncertain ending of the story provided a logical problem for Snorri and later mythographers, the outcome of the fight is irrelevant in mythological terms. Archetypal encounters of good and evil forces,

that is, the elements of order and chaos represented by mythic adversaries, are usually repeated at the time of the apocalypse, independent of the outcome of their former encounters. The return of evil at the end of the world is therefore not logically excluded by its defeat in former times (cf. Heizmann 1999b: 424). Thus the third and final encounter happens, as expected, at Ragnarök when Thor achieves definitive victory over the monster, but he himself dies from its poisonous breath (*Völuspá* 55–56; *Gylfaginning* 51; *Skáldskaparmál* 1).

The serpentine dragon shape of the Midgard monster, its association with the world sea, and the act of fishing as a form of encounter with evil recall a number of Christian parallels which were easily recognized in the conversion period (see Gschwantler 1968; Bibire 1984: 94–96). The most obvious parallel is Leviathan, a nautical monster of old legends. As a representative of primeval chaos and evil, it is described in the Old Testament as a dragon and/or serpent that was overcome by Yahweh in ancient times.² The closest parallel to Thor's fishing is Job 41. 1–2 that reports about catching Leviathan with a fishhook. The passage was already interpreted allegorically by Origen, who saw it as an example of *pia fraus*, a 'gentle deceit' played on Satan by Christ, in which Christ's human body served as a bait and his divine soul as fishhook for Satan, identified here with Leviathan. Satan ultimately delivered Christ to the cross, which fulfilled the divine plan of salvation. The allegory was very popular among the Church Fathers, who also interpreted the cross as Christ's hook to catch Satan, and through the writings of Gregory the Great (*Moralia in Job* and *Homily* 25) it reached the British Isles³ and Scandinavia. A clear evidence for the association of the Midgard serpent with Leviathan in medieval Scandinavia is provided by the use of the term *Midgarðrzormr* or *miðgarðar ormr* for Leviathan in the interlinear glosses of some homilies and the word *miðgarðrs ormr* for the dragon-shaped Satan in the *Niðrstigningar saga* (Heizmann 1999b: 424–28; Hultgård 1990: 356).

Psalms 74 mentions further 'dragons in the waters', and Isaiah 51. 9 gives scriptural references to the conquest of Rahab, the great sea monster, in ancient times. Sea monsters of the Celtic tradition, which show a number of resemblances with the Midgard serpent, were also incorporated into the Christian tradition of Ireland and are mentioned, for example, in Adomnán's *Life of Columba*, Book II, where the saint subdues a nautical monster with the sign of the cross. Further popular Christian dragon slayers who battled with similar serpentine dragons,

² Cf. Isaiah 27. 1: 'Leviathan, the wriggling, twisting dragon,' 'the monster that lives in the sea'; also Revelation 20. 2; Psalm 74. 14; Job 3. 8; Psalm 104. 26.

³ Cf. for example, Ælfric's use of the allegory in his homilies around the year 1000 (Thorpe 1844–46: 216–17; cited in Heizmann 1999b: 429).

St Michael and St George, and the obvious parallels between these saints and Germanic legendary heroes have already been pointed out in the previous chapter.

The Midgard serpent is of course not the only cruel serpent-dragon in the Norse mythological tradition. Níðhöggr, the serpentine dragon of death, is known to live at the base of Yggdrasil, and he gnaws on its roots (*Grímnismál* 32 and 35; *Gylfaginning* 15). He is also reported sucking on the corpses of the dead (*Völuspá* 39), and he will live on in the new world after Ragnarök (*Völuspá* 66). In the description of the post-apocalyptic world in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* 52, he appears as a Christianized instrument of punishment in Hvergelmir, part of the otherworld (Simek 1995: 293). The association of serpents and serpentine dragons with the world of the dead is also reflected in the popularity of serpentine ornaments on Viking-Age memorial stones, many of them from the conversion period.⁴

Thor's cosmic struggle with the evil serpent, together with his ongoing fight with giants, elevated him to the status of the protector of the gods. This pivotal role as the chief adversary of evil, combined with Thor's genealogical status (son of Odin, main god of the Viking-Age Norse pantheon) offered an obvious parallel between the Norse god and the figure of Christ. In the conversion period, Thor became one of the chief pagan counterparts of Christ (Davidson 1964: 73; DuBois 1999: 158–63), together with Odin and Balder, all of whom shared certain characteristics of the 'new' Christian deity. In the Viking period it became popular to wear miniature 'Thor's hammers' as amulets, probably as a reaction to Christians wearing cross pendants that resembled hammers in their form, as it is suggested by double-molds used for making both small crosses and hammers as pendants (e.g. the mold from Trendgården, Jutland, Denmark, in Roesdahl and Wilson 1992: 191, fig. 3). Thor's other symbol, the swastika, which often appears on cremation urns, is not dissimilar to the Christian cross either (Owen 1981: 25). Thor's popularity continued into the late Viking period in Scandinavia, which is demonstrated by a large number of geographical and personal names including the element 'Thor'.

Thor's Fishing Adventure in the Visual Arts

The number and distribution of surviving literary and iconographical sources suggest that the story of Thor's fishing enjoyed great popularity in the Viking period in a large geographical area. The story was well known already before

⁴ For a discussion of various meanings and uses of the serpentine *wyrmas* in a funerary context, with special attention to sculpture, see Thompson 2004: 132–69.

the year 1000 (see the evidence of skaldic poetry), and it was a popular theme in both poetry and art. Two of the skaldic poems, *Ragnarsdrápa* by Bragi Boddason, which tells of narrative scenes on a decorated shield, and *Húsdrápa* by Úlfr Uggason, which describes carvings in a hall, provide an early and direct link between the two modes of artistic expression. Both the poetic sources and the surviving visual representations focus on the dramatic moment of encounter between Thor and the serpent, and presuppose knowledge of the larger narrative context that is only known to us from later accounts (*Hymiskviða* and Snorri's *Prose Edda*).

Visual representations of Thor's fishing survive from both Scandinavia and the British Isles. The eldest extant representation of the myth is on the Gotland picture stone Ardre VIII (Figure 11 in Chapter 1).⁵ Three separate images might possibly be linked with the narrative. In the lower part of the stone there is a house with an ox in it and a man entering from the left. On the right two figures are leaving the same house, one possibly with an ox-head on his shoulder. The scene, if indeed part of the myth, might be interpreted as a depiction of Thor's acquiring his bait (an alternative solution is the robbery of the bull by Odin, Loki, and Hönir). To the left of the house, the same two figures appear in a small boat, one of them harpooning a fish. Separated by an unrelated scene, there is a second small boat with the same two figures above the first one. On the left there is a fishing line with a large bait or the Midgard serpent itself on the hook — probably a depiction of Thor and Hymir's fishing expedition (Lindqvist 1941–42: 1, 95–96; Meulengracht Sørensen 1986). The separation of the scenes is, however, puzzling and may be an indication that the two lower images illustrate another story.

The lower half of the early eleventh-century picture stone of Altuna (Uppland, Sweden) shows a single man in a boat. He is holding a hammer in his right hand and a thin fishing line in his left that has an animal head as bait. His left foot penetrates the bottom of the boat — a detail otherwise recorded only in Snorri's version of the story (*Gylfaginning* 48), where Thor pushed his feet down through the boat to the bottom of the sea in order to stand firm when pulling up the serpent. The winding body of the monster is under the boat, biting on the bait. On a partially damaged Viking-period stone carving from Hørdum (Thy, Denmark) there are two figures in a boat. The one in the middle of the boat is holding a long

⁵ A pre-Viking metal mount from Solberga (Östergötland, Sweden), which slightly pre-dates or is contemporary with the Gotland picture stones, shows a man fishing from a boat and a mermaid-like figure gripping the hook below the boat (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1980: fig. 15). It might be an early representation of Thor's fishing, but the mermaid-like female figure cannot be accounted for according to our knowledge of the story.

fishing line and his foot similarly penetrates the bottom of the boat. The other figure on the left is about to cut the line with an axe. The remains of the curving body of the serpent are visible in the damaged lower half of the carving.

In spite of the geographical and chronological differences, the sources suggest, with some variation, a number of constant elements in the story: the act of fishing with a boat, the intense moment of visual encounter between god and monster (looking fiercely into each other's eyes), the presence of the giant, the significance of Thor's hammer, and the element of journey. The uncertainties mainly surround the fate of the giant and the outcome of the encounter, and the variations in the narrative point towards a development of the proto-myth. As noted above, according to Snorri, the serpent survives the encounter. This seems to be a logical deduction of a conscious mythographer that repeats the unsuccessful outcome of the Útgardaloki episode, of which the fishing adventure is a variant in several ways, and fits with the following account of Ragnarök. However, it was not necessarily the original version of the myth. In an earlier version found in Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* the outcome seems to have been undecided, but subsequently a victorious ending with the death of the monster may have developed, similarly to universal narratives of dragon fights (Meulengracht Sørensen 1986: 270). Accordingly, other sources report (Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*, Gamli gnævaraðskáld's poem on Thor, probably the *Hymiskviða*, and even Snorri in *Gylfaginning* admits this possibility) that Thor dealt a blow on the serpent's head with his hammer and the monster sank back to the sea, defeated.

The first encounter between Thor and the serpent at Útgardaloki's hall is a variant of the fishing adventure with a focus on the encounter itself and the maintaining of the cosmic balance. In this context the serpent is not only a representative of evil in the binary opposition of good and evil, but also part of the cosmic order by being the boundary of the circular world. Therefore, Thor's struggle with the serpent is an expression and confirmation of the balance of powers in the cosmic world. The earlier version of the fishing myth also focuses on the confirmation of the cosmic order, which act can be repeated, because it is outside of time (Meulengracht Sørensen 1986: 272). The giant Hymir has a significant double role in the story as Thor's helper who makes the encounter possible, but also the one who prevents its completion by cutting the line, thus saving the cosmic balance. Snorri changes the originally atemporal perspective of the struggle and integrates it into his linear sequence of time, built on the concept of development, and so the encounter becomes a logical prequel to Ragnarök. The role of the Midgard serpent changes from being part of the cosmic balance to being the apocalyptic destroyer of the world.

Thor and the Midgard Serpent in the British Isles

There are altogether three monuments from the British Isles, two from the Isle of Man and one from Gosforth, Cumbria, to be noted in the context of the myth of Thor's fishing. However, the interpretations of the two Manx monuments are rather uncertain.

It was Philip Kermode (1907: 180–85; Kermode and Herdman 1914: 110–11) who suggested that the figure of a man with an 'ill-defined object' in his hand on side A of the so-called Thor Cross from Bride (no. 124 (97)) depicted Thor carrying the ox-head bait in his hand with which he was going to fish for the Midgard serpent, represented by the serpentine step-pattern border. Sue Margeson (1983: 96) questioned the identification of the object in his hand as an ox head, noted that the figure had what looked like a satchel on his chest, and suggested a Christian source for the image. On face B Kermode identified the scene of Thor's encounter with the serpent at Ragnarök, but due to the lack of any usual attributes of Thor, this identification seems problematic.

A second possible reference to the myth, rather than a direct depiction, might be found on the so-called Thorwald's Cross from Andreas (no. 128 (102)). The monument is best known for its apocalyptic image of Odin being devoured by Fenrir the wolf (see below) where Odin is identified by a spear and his raven, and his right foot is in the mouth of the canine monster. On the reverse side (B), under the left arm of the incised cross, there is a man holding a cross in his left hand and a square-shaped object, probably a book, in his right hand. There is a large, upward facing fish on his left; below and above him are two knotted serpents. Kermode (1907: 193) and Wilson (2008: 79, 81) suggested an undoubtedly Christian interpretation of the scene, the triumph of Christ, juxtaposing the fall of Odin on the reverse. The fish thus appears as a traditional symbol of Christ identifying the human figure with the book and the cross as Christ himself trampling on the adder and serpent (Psalm 90 (91). 13). In the iconographical context of the now known fragment of the slab depicting a god-monster encounter on the other side, an association with the catching of Leviathan (or Christ fishing for the Devil) is not to be completely excluded. Paul Bibire (1984) noted an intriguing anecdote in the *Orkneyinga saga* of a fishing trip of Earl Rögnvaldr (or St Ronald) of Orkney (d. 1158/59) that, although echoing obvious Christian typological models, resembles in a number of its narrative elements the myth of Thor's fishing.⁶ There are similar visual echoes on

⁶ These narrative elements include (Bibire 1984: 93) the hero coming in disguise (cf.

Thorwald's Cross that might have prompted an analogous comparison of pagan and Christian narratives: the cross in the human figure's hand clearly resembles Thor's hammer, the vertical position of the fish recalls the act of fishing, and the serpents echo the evil adversary in serpentine form. While the carving is clearly not a direct depiction of Thor's fishing, there may be enough visual echoes to suggest a parallel between the Norse myth and the patristic interpretations of the redemption as Christ fishing for the Devil, as suggested by Bibire (1984: 95) in the context of the narrative links of the St Ronald anecdote from Orkney.

There is only one stone carving from northern England that can be identified with certainty as depicting Thor's fishing for the Midgard serpent: the so-called 'Fishing Stone' (no. 6) from Gosforth, Cumbria (Figure 25). James Lang (1972–74: 241; 1984: 116) noted another monument, a hogback fragment from Bolton le Sands (no. 2, Lancashire), which shows on side C a large human demi-figure contending with the tail of a serpent. He interpreted the scene as Thor fishing for the Midgard serpent or wrestling with it. This identification is, however, unlikely. Not only does the carving lack the key iconographical elements of the fishing myth (except for the serpent), but it also represents a later, possibly Norman-period, recutting of the original hogback. It may belong with another recarved monument from the same site that depicts a figure with a book and possibly the Virgin and Child and thus carries a Christian meaning.⁷ Depictions of humans struggling with serpents are known from a number of Viking-age monuments (e.g. Gosforth 5, Lowther 4, Penrith 7, and quite differently on Brigham 5, Great Clifton 1), and an association with the Midgard serpent in some of these cases is not to be excluded, but the common use of serpentine monsters in art, both pagan and Christian, and the lack of further identifiable iconographical elements of the mythological narrative prevent us from identifying these carvings with any certainty as belonging to the iconography of Thor's encounter with the Midgard serpent.

Snorri), offering to row out early in the day with an old man (cf. Eysteinn Valdason), rowing out to a place of danger to fish, and beaching the boat and dealing with the catch (cf. *Hymiskviða*). Admittedly, one key element is missing: the direct encounter with the sea-monster. According to Bibire (1984: 93), there is a further 'curious correspondence' between the two stories in the use of the kenning 'Sif [wife of Thor] of silk' for a woman by St Ronald in the verse preserved and transmitted as part of the anecdote and two of the above-mentioned literary sources of the Thor myth, the verses of Eysteinn Valdason and the *Hymiskviða*, that use the uncommon kenning-type 'husband of Sif' for Thor.

⁷ I thank my anonymous reviewer for providing the above information on the Bolton le Sands hogback.



Figure 25. The 'Fishing Stone', part of slab or frieze, Gosforth (no. 6), Cumbria. First half of tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

The Gosforth 'Fishing Stone' has been identified as the work of an anonymous tenth-century carver known as the Gosforth Master who was also responsible for the large cross (Bailey and Lang 1975). It was discovered in 1882 by C. A. Parker and built into the chancel wall of the church. Originally it may have been part of a larger frieze or, according to Calverley (1899: 169), of a low broad cross (like the one at Dacre). The only visible face of the stone is divided into two panels. The lower panel shows two frontal men in a boat with a topped mast between them. The figure on the right is holding an axe in his right hand, while the figure on the left has in his right a hammer-like object and in his left a thick fishing line with an animal's head at its end. Below the boat there are four large fish, and in

the right-hand corner a loop which might have belonged to a serpentine body. The carving depicts Thor's fishing adventure with the giant Hymir and contains all but one of the distinctive iconographical elements of the story: Thor with his hammer, the boat, the fishing line with the ox-head bait, Hymir ready to cut the line, and part of the coiling serpent. Only Thor's foot penetrating the bottom of the boat, as recorded on the stones of Altuna and Hørdum and by Snorri, is missing here.

Above the scene and below the moulding separating the two panels is a knotted serpentine motif. The upper panel shows a hart struggling with one or two serpents. The hart's head, largely broken away, is turning backwards, and its front legs are fettered by the knotted body of a snake. The knot between its rear legs might represent another serpent, although Richard Bailey described it as the 'knotted extension of its tail' (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 108). The opposition of hart (or stag) and snake has been noted since Antiquity (cf. Lucretius, Lucan, Pliny the Elder, later Isidore of Seville), and in Christian iconography a hart struggling with or trampling on snakes came to represent Christ's battle with evil, where evil is depicted as a serpent. A backward looking hart engaged with serpents appears on the baptismal font of Melbury Bubb (no. 1), Dorset (Cramp 2006: 105). In a baptismal context it references the rejuvenating power of water that the stag drinks after defeating the serpent, as recorded in the bestiary tradition, and thus reminds the baptized to combat evil (Cramp 2006: 39). Similarly, stags (without serpents) frequently appear drinking at a stream, symbolizing the soul longing for God and thirsty for the cleansing water of baptism (cf. Psalm 42. 1). The image of a hart struggling with serpents is also known from pre-Christian Scandinavia: it appears, for example, on the Gotland picture stones, on silver coins from the first half of the ninth century, and on the gold bracteate Skrydstrup-B from Denmark (Heizmann 1999a: 245; 1999b: 430). According to classical and medieval belief, the hart knew the herbs against snakebite, thus these images are thought to refer to healing and victory over death and evil.⁸

According to Bailey, the significance of the two panels of the 'Fishing Stone' lies in their complementary nature, which he interpreted as 'radical theological speculation' and a 'commentary from one theological system on another' (1981: 87; also see 1980: 132; Bailey and Cramp 1988: 109). In both panels the evil appears as a serpent, and the depictions focus on the struggle between good and evil. Since the hart-and-serpent motif is usually interpreted as implying Christ's ultimate victory over evil, the uncertain outcome of Thor's fishing

⁸ The healing function is confirmed by corresponding runic inscriptions on bracteates.

adventure has often been addressed in this context. The two possibilities are the following. If the fishing ends with the death of the Midgard serpent, a parallel could be seen between Thor and Christ as victorious adversaries of the serpentine evil. If, however, the Midgard serpent survives and escapes, one might suspect an intended opposition between the two theological systems, which would emphasize the victory of Christianity over Germanic paganism. This second reading is improbable for two reasons. First, the depiction focuses on the dramatic encounter itself, and so does the hart-and-serpent motif, so it would be erroneous to shift the emphasis from the struggle between good and evil, a central theme of many mythological systems, to the victory of good over evil. The parallel is thus seen in the nature of the fight and not in the resemblance or opposition of its outcome. Second, an opposition of the two religious systems like that would not be in line with the interpretative strategy of the Gosforth Master as it is reflected in the elaborate iconographical programme of the Gosforth cross (see below), suggesting an interest in parallels and analogies rather than in oppositions.

Among the depictions of mythical encounters of the final days, the Gosforth cross also features on its principal face the Midgard serpent's monster-sibling, Fenrir. It is to this monster that we turn our attention now.

Fenrir the Wolf

Loki's other offspring, Fenrir (Old Norse *Fenrir* or *Fenrisúlfr*) is a mythical monster in the shape of a wolf.⁹ He is genealogically related to the forces of chaos, and, similarly to the Midgard serpent, his existence poses a constant threat to the world of the *Æsir*. The mythical canine represents the threat of the devourer: the fear of engulfment, dismemberment, and consumption (Salisbury 1994: 69; Pluskowski 2003: 158–59; Larrington 2006), and at the same time he personifies the temporal limitations of human and divine existence. According to the prophecy, the wolf swallows Odin and, possibly also, the sun at Ragnarök — an act which puts an end to the age of the gods (the reign of Odin) as well as to the temporal cycles of the created world (represented by the movements of the celestial bodies). As a preventive measure, Fenrir is removed from the community of the gods, fettered, with his mouth propped wide open, and confined to an island

⁹ Fenrir's name, related to Old Norse *fen* meaning 'moor, lake, or sea', suggests a link with monsters of destruction and death known from other mythologies, which usually abide in the sea, similarly to the Midgard serpent. Fenrir might represent a land version of the same beast (Heizmann 1999a: 248).

where he remains until Ragnarök. His gaping mouth, with the upper jaw touching the sky and the lower one touching earth, is an indicator of his menacing role as the devourer. The association of the wolf's gaping mouth with death may have contributed to the development of the hell-mouth iconography, a characteristic feature and innovation of Anglo-Saxon art (Schmidt 1995: 27–31, 61–83; Pluskowski 2003: 160).

Similarly to his serpentine sibling, Fenrir is defined by his adversaries and is involved in two major episodes in Norse mythology: the story of his fettering and the events of Ragnarök. Interestingly, surviving accounts of the two encounters feature two different adversaries, Tyr and Odin, respectively. The story of Fenrir's fettering is presented in detail in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* 34 as part of his account of Loki's children. Snorri provides us with a biography of the monster and reports about the gods' growing fear of him. The gods decide to tie him up with strong fetters to ward off their foretold destiny, but the first two attempts prove to be unsuccessful. Finally they acquire from the dwarves a magical fetter called Gleipnir, constructed from six unusual elements: the noise of a cat's footsteps, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, the sinew of a bear, the breath of a fish, and the spittle of a bird. The Æsir invite the wolf to test the fetters to prove his strength, but the suspicious Fenrir only allows them to lay the fetter on him if one of them puts his hand into his jaws as a pledge that there is no treachery involved in the challenge. Tyr, the wolf's caregiver and the only one among the Æsir who dares to approach the monster, puts his right hand into Fenrir's mouth and loses it when the wolf realizes that he cannot break the magical fetters. The gods bind the trapped Fenrir on a rock and wedge a sword in his jaws, which makes him howl terribly. Thus he lies bound until Ragnarök, when he breaks free to kill Odin.

Even though among the eddic lays only *Lokasenna* 38–39 points directly to the fettering of Fenrir as the cause of the loss of Tyr's hand, Tyr is often referred to in poetry as the *einhendi áss*, 'one-handed god', which appears to indicate that it is an old feature in the myth. It also emphasizes the significance of Tyr's encounter with Fenrir. However, his role in the encounter is not heroic but rather sacrificial: the god sacrifices himself in order to secure the cosmic order. By the Viking period at the latest, Tyr ceases to be seen as the chief adversary of Fenrir. This is supported by the fact that in the Ragnarök events, as reported by Snorri, Fenrir destroys Odin, while Tyr finds his death by another canine monster, Garm. Snorri describes Garm as 'the worst of the monsters' that is also bound but breaks free from his chains (*Gylfaginning* 51; also *Völuspá* 44, 49, 58). The exact relationship between Garm and Fenrir remains unclear. In Snorri's rationalized system of pairs of adversaries he appears as a clearly separate being and the adversary of

Tyr, but it may only be Snorri's contribution. The obvious similarities between the two monsters (canine beings; bound to or in front of rocks and howling terribly; breaking free at Ragnarök) suggest a clear parallel and overlap, if not total identity of the two creatures, at least in the early sources (Turville-Petre 1964: 281; Davidson 1964: 59; Orchard 2002: 109; Heizmann 1999a: 232). The original adversary of the ancient canine beast may have been the god Tiwaz (later Tiw, whose name survives in 'Tuesday'), god of the sky, war, law, and order, who survived in the figure of Tyr, with many of his functions taken over by Odin. The shift and split of functions from the Germanic Tiwaz to the later Norse gods of Tyr and Odin may have resulted in a split of the character of the monstrous adversary as well.

Fenrir's second appearance escalates in the fulfilment of his eschatological role as the destroyer of Odin. As one of the preliminary events of Ragnarök, he breaks free from his magical fetters and joins the forces of chaos in order to kill Odin, as prophesied. He meets the chief god of the Æsir at the battlefield called Vígríðr, the scene of the final battle, and kills him by devouring him (*Gylfaginning* 34; *Völuspá* 53; *Vafþrúðnismál* 52–53; *Lokasenna* 58). Odin's death is cruelly avenged by his son Vidar, who puts his foot in the lower jaw of the monster and tears him apart by grabbing his upper jaw (*Vafþrúðnismál* 53). According to the *Völuspá* (55), which documents a different narrative tradition, Vidar stabs a sword into the monster's heart. In the eschatological context Snorri (in *Gylfaginning* 12) also mentions the wolves Sköll and Hati, the offspring of Fenrir (also known from the *Grímnismál* 39 and *Völuspá*), that chase and catch up with the sun and the moon respectively, as well as two unnamed wolves that swallow these two celestial bodies (*Gylfaginning* 51). *Vafþrúðnismál* 47 records another variant of the story and attributes the swallowing of the sun to Fenrir himself. Here we can observe Snorri's synthesizing and rationalizing efforts again, and we may assume that in the earlier tradition the cosmic wolf swallowing the sun may have been identical with Fenrir (Heizmann 1999a: 232–34; Larrington 2006: 542).

The Iconographical Evidence

The earliest visual representations of Fenrir, from as early as the first century AD, are found on gold bracteates. Trollhättan-B in Västergötland (Sweden) depicts Tyr's sacrifice (losing his left hand, not his right as in Snorri), while Skrydstrup-B in Jütland (Denmark) shows Fenrir's encounter with Odin at Ragnarök. The bodily posture of the canine monster as well as the accompanying hart-and-snake motif and runic inscription on the latter object suggest that Odin survives the

encounter (discussed in detail in Heizmann 1999a: 244–46). In spite of the frequent references to Fenrir in Norse literary sources, there is no undisputed iconographical representation surviving from Viking-Age Scandinavia. An early eleventh-century rune stone from Ledberg (Ög 181, Östergötland, Sweden) depicts a warrior in a helmet whose foot is in the mouth of a canine beast, an image which has plausibly been interpreted as a depiction of Odin's encounter with Fenrir at Ragnarök. However, due to the lack of further specific iconographical details of Ragnarök, the carving, as part of a visual narrative sequence on both sides of the stone, may depict a scene from the lives of Torgautr and/or Gunna, the two individuals commemorated in the accompanying runic inscription (Heizmann 1999a: 235). One of the Mammen horse collars also features a man being swallowed by a large serpentine monster. That might also represent Odin being devoured by Fenrir (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1980: 100, and pl. xxxvi a), where the serpentine feature of the animal may be the indication of its menacing nature (see also the serpentine Fenrir of the Gosforth cross). Identifiable depictions of a canine Fenrir from Scandinavia are found in Icelandic paper manuscripts of the *Prose Edda*, but they are all of much later dates (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) (Heizmann 1999a: 235).

Encounters with Fenrir in the Insular Tradition

The earliest reference to Fenrir in Anglo-Saxon England may be provided by an unusual decoration on the shoulder of a cremation urn (R9/10) from the early Saxon cemetery of Caistor St Edmund in Norfolk (fifth to sixth century). The fragment shows a wolf-like quadruped along with a stylized ship with thirteen oars. The drawing has been interpreted as (a local version of) a Ragnarök scene with Fenrir and the ship Naglfar (Green 1973: 118, in Pestell forthcoming).¹⁰ The image is unparalleled in the insular record, but the same pairing of wolf and ship appears on the Tullstorp rune stone (DR 271) in Skåne, Sweden. The rune stone has been similarly interpreted as a depiction of a Ragnarök scene with Fenrir and Naglfar. Alternatively, John McKinnel (2005: 114–15) describes the stylized boat as a ritual funeral ship and assigns a funerary (rather than eschatological) context to the image (discussed in the larger context of Balder's funeral and Thor's encounter with the giantess Hyrrokkin). Both alternatives would of course be appropriate for decorating a cremation urn. Two die-identical bracteates (I

¹⁰ I would like to thank Tim Pestell for sharing his research and his forthcoming article with me.

and III) from Binham, Norfolk, may offer proof of the circulation also of the myth of Tyr's encounter with Fenrir already in the early Anglo-Saxon period. The bracteates show a male figure with a sword in his right fighting a quadruped with an unusually long, beak-like snout. The left hand of the male figure clearly touches the beast's long jaws as if they were biting it. On his right the figure is flanked by a second, smaller quadruped. The image has been interpreted as Tiw (the later Norse Tyr) fighting 'demons' (see Pestell forthcoming), but the god's ill-fated encounter with Fenrir might be an equally plausible interpretation and offer a parallel to some of the carvings discussed below.

Later insular depictions of Fenrir are confined to the Scandinavian settlement areas: the Isle of Man and northern England. A further example of the role of wolves at Ragnarök may possibly be provided by a hogback from Tynninghame in East Lothian, now in the National Museum of Scotland, showing two canine beasts flanking and laying their forepaws upon a sphere. The motif was interpreted by A. Fenton as the wolves who consume the sun and the moon at Ragnarök (cf. Stevenson 1959: 47; cited in Lang 1972: 241). On the above-mentioned Thorwald's Cross from Andreas (no. 128 (102)) on the Isle of Man, Fenrir appears devouring Odin at Ragnarök. The broken slab shows under the right arm of the incised cross a male figure with a bird of prey on his shoulder and a spear in his hand. He is attacked by a canine beast from below, and his foot is already in the beast's mouth. Since the bird of prey and the spear are both attributes of Odin, the interpretation of the scene as Odin's death at Ragnarök seems highly plausible. Based on the detail of the human figure's left hand touching the beast's upper jaw, Axel Olrik (1922: 10–11 in Heizmann 1999a: 236) suggested an interpretation of the image as Vidar avenging his father's death by ripping apart the monster. The iconography of the other side of the slab (discussed above) shows Christ trampling on snakes, with a possible visual hint to the fishing of the nautical monster of evil. The pairing of these images on the two faces of the cross slab might suggest the superiority of Christianity over the old religion by juxtaposing the figure of Christ with the failure and death of Odin in the fight against Fenrir.

Among the stone monuments from northern England, only two depict Tyr's sacrifice with some certainty: a hogback in Sockburn (Co. Durham) and another large hogback from Lythe (Northern Yorkshire). The rest of the carvings relate the Ragnarök events and depict Odin's death by Fenrir, Vidar's avenging his father's death, or the swallowing of the celestial bodies.

The worn and badly damaged hogback of Sockburn (no. 21) is dated to the last quarter of the ninth or first quarter of the tenth century. The two long sides of the stone are decorated with almost identical scenes depicting a frontal human



Figure 26. Hogback, Sockburn (no. 21A), Co. Durham. Late ninth to early tenth century.
Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.



Figure 27. Hogback, Sockburn (no. 21C), Co. Durham. Late ninth to early tenth century.
Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

figure, with arms extended, flanked by two canine beasts and surrounded by other quadrupeds. On side A of the hogback the human figure is slightly left of centre and his arms are extended towards the two beasts at his two sides (Figure 26). His right hand is in the jaws of one of the beasts, while his left hand is below the large open mouth of another. One of the quadrupeds on the left seems to be bound by a chain-like fetter which rises up to touch the right side of the man (or this 'chain' might be the continuation of the tail of another beast) (Cramp 1984: 143). The beast nearest to the man on the right might also be fettered. Similarly, the other side (C) also shows a man in the centre with outstretched arms and flanked by three beasts on both sides (Figure 27). At least one of the beasts on the left is bound, and its gaping jaws touch the right hand of the man. The human figure is either holding a dagger(?) or the end of a chain that encircles the front and back legs of the beast on the right (Cramp 1984: 143).

Side A almost certainly depicts Tyr sacrificing his hand when fettering Fenrir. The prominent position of the man's right hand placed into the beast's mouth

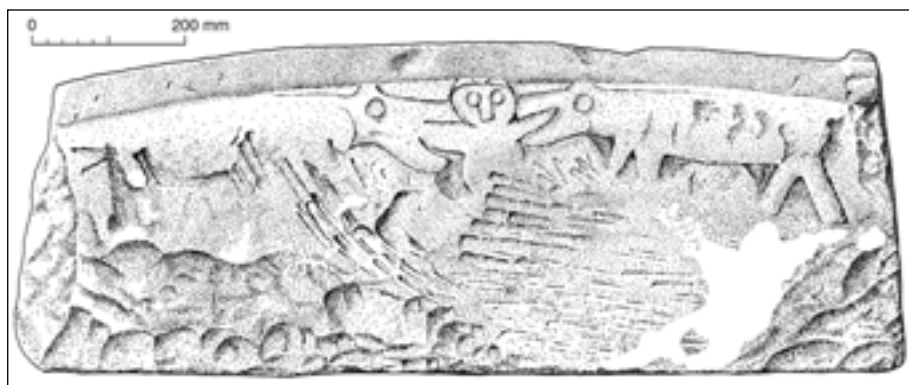


Figure 28. Hogback, Lythe (no. 29), Northern Yorkshire. First half of tenth century.
Copyright York Archaeological Trust.

suggests that the depiction is more than just a generic man-flanked-by-beasts pattern, which is otherwise well attested in insular, Scandinavian, and Irish art. The other large beast could represent the hound that kills Tyr at Ragnarök (possibly identical with Fenrir). In that case we would have a combined representation of Tyr's two encounters with the canine monster or monsters. The other beasts may be free animal carvings to fill up the panel or the beasts that join the wolf at Ragnarök (Lang 1972: 238–40). Side C represents a similar scene, but not necessarily the same. The popular theme of the Lord of the Animals may be a possible interpretation, which, according to Rosemary Cramp (1984: 144), would present a 'theoretic contrast' here, presumably between a successful and a less successful lord of the beasts. Its earliest interpreters, W. H. Knowles and C. C. Hodges, identified the carving as 'possibly' Daniel in the lions' den, and it was also thought to depict Adam naming the animals (cf. Lang 1972: 238). Similarly, the carving may also represent David slaying the lion, prefiguring Christ as lord of the animals (Cramp 2010: 25–26). The cruciform position of both human figures (on sides A and C) prompted Rosemary Cramp to suggest that 'this Sockburn hogback could, in the period of conversion, link the sacrifice of the god Tyr with the sacrifice of Christ' (2010: 26).

Almost the same image has recently been identified on a large and worn hogback from the parish church of St Oswald in Lythe (no. 29; Northern Yorkshire). The monument that had been standing in the graveyard has been cleaned of layers of lichen and moss, which revealed a previously unnoticed figural carving on side C (Mee 2008: 16–17; yet unrecognized in Lang 2001: 164). Similarly to the Sockburn hogback, the Lythe carving shows a frontal human



Figure 29. Shaft fragment, Forcett (no. 4), Northern Yorkshire. First half of tenth century. Photo: Derek Craig. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

figure with round eyes standing between two large canine beasts (Figure 28). His hands are in the mouths of the beasts. Based on the obvious similarity with Sockburn, an interpretation of the image as Tyr's attempt to fetter Fenrir is equally probable in this case too.

A somewhat similar image of a human figure extending his hand over or towards a quadruped is depicted on an early tenth-century shaft fragment from Forcett (no. 4) in Northern Yorkshire (Figure 29). The carving does show similarities in design to the Sockburn images; however, two of its iconographical features seem to exclude the possibility that the carving represents Tyr and Fenrir, as suggested tentatively by Lang (2001: 111): the human figure has a double halo or large hood and he is extending his left (and not right) hand over the quadruped which is quite small and humble looking. The image probably has a Christian background and may depict God the Father with the *Agnus Dei* (Lang 2001: 111) or a sacrificial scene.

Two additional carvings from Co. Durham, Gainford 4B and Chester-le-Street 11A, depict bound canines that may possibly be associated with the iconography of the bound Fenrir (discussed in detail in the next section). The rest of the carvings from northern England that had been associated with the wolf Fenrir all depict different episodes of Ragnarök: the monster's destruction of Odin, his death by Vidar, and the devouring of the sun. The most obvious depiction of the eschatological events is found on the Gosforth cross. (For a description of the complete iconographical programme of the cross see below.) In the upper part of its eastern face (C) there are two interlaced beasts with canine heads, one facing upwards, the other downwards (Figure 30). The jaws of the



Figure 30 (left). Cross shaft and head, Gosforth (no. 1C, east), Cumbria. First half of tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.



Figure 31 (right). Cross shaft and head, Gosforth (no. 1B, south), Cumbria. First half of tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

lower beast are spread by a human figure who is putting his foot in the lower jaw and pushing the upper jaw upwards with his hand. In his other hand he is holding a spear. It is generally accepted that the carving depicts Vidar avenging the death of his father, Odin. Early interpreters favoured a Christian reading of Christ opening the mouth of the beast of hell or the Harrowing of Hell. S. Bugge and G. Dumézil suggested a mixing of the two traditions, pagan and Christian, both representing the victory of a young god over the forces of death and evil (noted in Heizmann 1999a: 239). While I favour the interpretation of the carving as Vidar, an intended parallel between Christ, depicted at the bottom of the same face, and Vidar seems quite certain in the light of the overall iconographical programme of the cross.

On the same cross another canine animal (wolf or dog) appears on side B (south), situated towards the lower half of the shaft above the image of a horseman holding a spear (Figure 31). The beast is depicted vertically, as if running upwards. Next to it is a tangle of interlace (serpents or bonds), and above it a hart. The canine beast has been interpreted by W. S. Calverley (1899: 149–53) as the Helhound Garm, and the horseman below him as Odin. H. R. Ellis Davidson (1950: 130) suggested that the entangled lines represented the discarded bonds of the wolf that had broken free (cf. also Calverley 1899: 152). The carving may certainly recall associations with Fenrir, but the lack of further distinctive iconographical elements makes this interpretation uncertain.¹¹ On the same face, above the hart, there is an upward-facing beast with an interlace body and a gaping mouth. He is biting a circular object that seems to encircle his head. It may be a depiction of the devouring of the sun (or celestial bodies), a scene possibly depicted (with a very different iconography) on the Ovingham shaft (see below).

The events of Ragnarök may have also been recorded on a poorly executed slab with incised graffiti (possibly a trial piece) from Skipwith (no. 1, Eastern Yorkshire, dated ninth to eleventh century) (Figure 32). The busy carving shows a confused group of warriors in helmets and various animals. On the left a large

¹¹ An interesting parallel between this image and the gold bracteate Skrydstrup-B should be noted here. The bracteate (discussed in Heizmann 1999a: 244–46) also shows an upward-running canine, interpreted as Fenrir, Odin (identified by two accompanying birds of prey), and a hart stepping on two intertwined serpents. The image depicts Fenrir's encounter with Odin at Ragnarök and his devouring him, while the hart-and-snake motif with the accompanying runic inscription *laukaR* 'leek' points towards the cleansing and renewal of the world of gods after Ragnarök. Whether the Gosforth artist purposefully used this iconographical pattern and the hound could indeed be interpreted as Fenrir or Garmr and the rider as Odin is, however, questionable.



Figure 32. Stone slab, Skipwith (no. 1), Eastern Yorkshire. Ninth to eleventh century.
Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

man with outstretched arms is facing right. In the middle, below his left arm, another man in a cap or helmet is being swallowed by a large canine beast (his foot is already in its mouth). Between the man's arm and the beast's back is a serpent attacking the first man in his armpit. Further smaller human figures are visible at the bottom and on the right. There may also be a frontal human mask of the Middleton style and a crucifix on the right-hand side of the carving (Lang 1991: 214), but none of these are clearly visible. The image of a canine beast biting the foot of a man recalls the depiction from Ledberg, and possibly depicts Odin being devoured by Fenrir. The man with the serpent could represent Thor and the Midgard serpent (although that would be an unusual depiction), while the other warriors might be *einherjar*, Odin's warriors at the final battle. If the faint carving on the right indeed showed a Crucifixion, the iconographical programme of the stone would present a parallel to that of the Gosforth cross (discussed in further detail below).

A cross-shaft fragment of late tenth- or early eleventh-century date from Ovingham (no. 1, Northumberland) seems to document a different episode



Figure 33. Upper part of cross shaft, fragment, Ovingham (no. 1C), Northumberland. Mid-tenth to early eleventh century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

of the Ragnarök events: the devouring of the celestial bodies — another act associated directly with Fenrir or canine monsters. Side C of the broken shaft shows an unusual carving that is difficult to decipher due to its unparalleled iconography and the weathered state of the carving (Figure 33). On the right there is a man with a large horn or club, facing another figure in semi-profile on the left holding a beast that reaches towards a disk between the heads of the two figures. The figure on the left has either headgear or long hair knotted at his neck. The scene has been interpreted variously. Richard Bailey (1980: 133) suggested that the carving represented a Ragnarök scene with Fenrir (or another wolf, in the middle) swallowing the sun (represented by the disk), accompanied by Loki bursting his bounds (left) and Heimdall with his horn (right). Such an interpretation would assume a conflation of various events in one concise image, which in itself is not unusual as a compositional technique, though no parallel is known to this particular scene. Alternatively, Rosemary Cramp (1984: 216) put forward a Christian reading, interpreting the scene as David, Goliath with a club, and a lion. The image might also be a simple hunting scene with a leashed hound,

although the arrangement of the figures would be unusual. The carving on the facing side (A) shows the portrait of a saint or Christ with a book (and possibly a bird). Since the monument is only a fragment, the original iconographical programme remains unknown and thus any interpretation uncertain.

According to the testimony of Viking-Age insular representations of Fenrir and his encounters with Tyr and Odin, we might suppose a narrative tradition slightly different from the one represented in the later Norse literary sources. The uncertainties surrounding the iconography of almost all the monuments listed above does not allow us to reconstruct the details of the insular versions of these stories, but the two key episodes involving Fenrir (his fettering by Tyr and his encounter with Odin and later with Vidar at Ragnarök) seem to have featured prominently also in the narrative tradition of Viking-Age England. Skaldic poetry further supports the claim, alongside sculptural evidence, that both Tyr and Fenrir were known in an Anglo-Scandinavian cultural context. Tyr is mentioned in Thórðr Kolbeinsson's *Eiríksdrápa* (composed for Eirik Hakonarson) (Jesch 2001: 319), while *Eiríksmál* (an encomium for Erik Bloodaxe of York) mentions 'sér ulfr enn hösve á sjöt goða' (st. 7, 'the grey wolf [...] gazing upon the abodes of the gods') ready to attack any time (st. 6 in Kershaw 1922: 96–97).

The two episodes involving Fenrir, although often handled separately, form two parts of the same narrative sequence; it points towards the eschatological role of the wolf as the representative of death and destruction that ultimately becomes an instrument of re-creation and cleansing. Its fettering by the gods, including the episode of Tyr's sacrifice, is an attempt to secure the cosmic order, which largely corresponds in its mythological function to Thor's fishing for the Midgard serpent, although the latter is aimed at the destruction rather than the containment of the monster. Fenrir plays a prominent role in the final destruction of the world by devouring the chief god of the pantheon as well as the central celestial body (according to *Vafþrúðnismál*). The final destruction at Ragnarök, however, is only the prerequisite of a new beginning, the emerging of a new world. Odin's death by monstrous consumption recalls the fate of other mythological heroes (most notably of Jonah, and its typological parallel in the Harrowing of Hell) whose 'deaths' were followed by a rebirth into a better life. After his death at Ragnarök, Odin is avenged by and thus survives in his son, Vidar, who becomes the ruler of the new world, and also the sun bears a daughter to follow in her path. The iconography and inscription of the gold bracteate Skrydstrup-B also supports this idea of victorious renewal and rebirth (cf. Heizmann 1999a: 244–47). Odin's, as well as the other gods', death is a self-sacrifice, and with the destruction of the forces of chaos it becomes a victory over death, which brings about a new beginning.

The Bound Evil

The powerful image of the bound Fenrir, the guarantee of the temporary balance of mythical forces, also found representations in art as a version of the widespread iconography of the Bound Evil. The image of the Bound Evil (or Bound Devil) was a popular representation of the victory over evil in both literature and art, and in a Christian context it often appears in various depictions of hell and the apocalypse. The biblical passage of Revelation 20. 2, which refers to the binding of Satan, describes him as a serpentine dragon, bound. The Anglo-Saxon concept of hell, largely based on apocryphal sources and including a number of local innovations in its visual representations, also includes the image of Satan bound, usually surrounded by snakes, adders, and serpentine beasts. The Old English poem *Genesis B* (371–85) describes Satan in hell as bound in iron bonds, fettered at his feet, hands, and neck. Tenth- and eleventh-century insular manuscript illuminators made use of this image frequently,¹² and we also find it in a number of continental manuscripts, for example, of the commentary on the Apocalypse by Beatus Liébana, or in the Bamberg Apocalypse (c. 1000), where false prophets are also chained in hell.

The concept of the Bound Devil found obvious pagan parallels in early medieval England, which must have contributed to the popularity of the image and also provided an already well-known iconographical pattern.¹³ In Norse mythology there are two evil-doers who become fettered by the gods but break free at Ragnarök: Fenrir¹⁴ and Loki. Fenrir's fettering by Tyr has been discussed above, together with its visual representations. Loki's binding as a punishment

¹² Cf. for example, the representation of hell on page 20 of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11 (c. 1000), where Satan is depicted as a winged, nude figure with flaming hair, bound at his hands and feet over flames (cf. Ohlgren 1991: 15–16, pl. 5 on p. 13); or the Jannes and Mambres illustration from the *Marvels of the East* in London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius B. V, fol. 87^v, where the Devil appears bound and intertwined with a dog-headed serpent (cf. Ohlgren 1991: 5–6, pl. 2 on p. 2). In the Harrowing of Hell image of an eleventh-century psalter in London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius C. VI, Christ tramples down the crooked and naked figure of Satan with his hands and feet ringed and fettered (Henderson 1972: 86–87).

¹³ Fettering in general had a ritual significance in heathen Germanic culture, and the ability of laying and springing fetters was associated mainly with Odin. On the ritual of binding in general, see Eliade 1961: 92–124; on fetters in a Germanic context, see, for example, Davidson 1964: 63–64.

¹⁴ Garm could of course also be mentioned here, but as we have seen above, it was closely associated with Fenrir, and might have even denoted the same creature.

for Balder's murder precedes the Ragnarök events and represents the gods' last attempt to preserve the cosmic order. It is recorded in most detail in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* 49–50 and in a shorter form in the prose conclusion to *Lokasenna*. Allusions to it are found in *Lokasenna* 49 and 50 and in *Völuspá* 35. According to the story, Balder, the son of Odin and Frigg, had a series of disturbing dreams foretelling his untimely death. In order to protect him, Frigg took oaths from all things in creation that they would not harm Balder. However, the treacherous Loki deceived the blind god Höd into shooting a mistletoe dart at Balder as part of a game of the gods who amused themselves by trying to attack the invulnerable god. The young mistletoe that had not yet taken the oath killed Balder and left the Æsir in a state of despair. They tried to retrieve the much beloved god from Hel's realm but in vain, due to the disguised Loki's refusal to weep for him. As a punishment for his evil deeds the gods captured Loki (in the shape of a salmon) and tied him to three stones in a cave with the intestines of his own son, Nari (or Narfi). They fastened a poisonous snake above his head whose venom is dripping on his face. Loki's wife, Sigyn, tries to catch up the venom in a bowl, but whenever she has to empty the bowl, the poison drips on his face and he shakes in his pain, which causes earthquakes.¹⁵

In the art of early medieval Scandinavia, Loki's punishment is depicted on the picture stone of Ardre VIII in Gotland, where he appears in the lower right-hand corner lying within a frame and surrounded by four serpents (Figure 11). His wife Sigyn is standing next to him with a beaker or horn in each hand, waiting to catch the snake's venom (Lindqvist 1941–42: I, 96; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1980: 81–82). Lindqvist (1941–42: II, 14) also recognized the scene of Loki's punishment on the stone of Alskog kyrka (Gotland). In the damaged lower middle section the lying Loki is accompanied by Sigyn, above them a large serpent with open mouth descending from a curved 'roof'. As we will see below, the northern English material presents a similar iconography of the same scene.

Fettering or binding by rings and bars in insular and Scandinavian art also recalls the representation of two heroic figures discussed above, Gunnar and

¹⁵ Loki's binding seems to be more than just a punishment for Balder's killing and his refusal to weep for him. His fathering of the three monsters, Fenrir, the Midgard serpent, and Hel, is also referenced in this carefully orchestrated punishment. As Carolyn Larrington has explained: 'The configuration of the tableau of Loki's captivity which Snorri elaborates: the wolf-guts [more precisely, the guts of his son Nari or Narfi torn out by his other son, Vali, in the shape of a wolf — note is mine], the serpent (*eitormr*) hanging over Loki's face [...] and the attentive woman, holding a vessel, seems to allude to Loki's fatherhood: his paternity binds him to signs of the monster siblings, Loki's most significant contribution to the apocalypse of *ragna rök*' (2006: 545).

Wayland. Even though the method of binding appears to be the same in the visual representations (cf. for example, side B of the Sigurd slab in Andreas, Isle of Man (no. 121 (95)) for Gunnar in the snake pit, and the Leeds crosses for Wayland), an association of the Bound Evil with these two characters can clearly be excluded.

Binding also appears as a uniquely northern feature of Crucifixion iconography in Viking-Age Scandinavia (thus in association with Christ, not with Satan). Two unusual Crucifixion types — (1) when Christ is bound to the cross, and (2) when he is entwined by a scroll — have been discussed in the context of Christian iconographical traditions by Signe Horn Fuglesang (1981). For the iconography of Christ bound on the cross she suggests the following three possible origins: the Anglo-Saxon stylization of garments, the representations of a variety of mostly decorative figures whose limbs are entwined with ribbons or animals, and finally the traditional iconographical representations of the thieves, St Andrew, and other saints as bound to the cross. She discards a direct link with the pagan tradition. However, the popularity of the representation of the bound Christ in northern Europe might have been reinforced by the significance of binding in general in the native tradition. According to Fuglesang, this unique representation seems to be 'a purely pictorial type unconnected with theological ideas' (1981: 86), which, however, does not exclude the impact of the pre-Christian artistic tradition. The most unusual, and probably most famous, representation of this pictorial type is found on the Jelling stone, where the crucified Christ is entwined by a scroll and bound by rings. Whether this depiction has its origins in the Christian iconography and biblical tradition of vine scrolls, as suggested by Fuglesang (1981: 87–89), or it was (also) influenced by the native tradition requires further investigation.

Among the bound figures of Viking-Age monuments in northern England, there is only one carving that can be associated with certainty with a particular mythological narrative: this is the small image at the bottom of side A (west) of the Gosforth cross (Figure 34). Separated from the scene above (an upside-down horseman) by a curved line (roof), there is a bound figure lying on his back, accompanied by a kneeling female figure with long braided hair holding a bowl. Above his face is the head of a snake apparently hanging from the roof (cf. *Alskog kyrka*). This allows for an interpretation of the carving as the fettered Loki with his wife, Sigyn. While other images of bound figures seem to suggest a general representation of evil by an iconographical pattern that is possibly anchored in both pagan and Christian traditions, and thus allow for a mixing of the two traditions in one image, the bound Loki on the Gosforth cross clearly illustrates one particular story which is part of the overall iconographical programme of the cross depicting various scenes of Ragnarök (discussed below).



Figure 35. The 'Bound Devil Stone', part of cross shaft, Kirkby Stephen (no. 1A), Cumbria. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

Figure 34. Cross shaft (detail), Gosforth (no. 1A, west), Cumbria. First half of tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

The most impressive image of a bound figure is carved on a tenth-century cross-shaft fragment, known as the 'Bound Devil Stone' from Kirkby Stephen in Westmorland (no. 1, face A; Figure 35). The carving shows a large frontal male figure with broad shoulders and hanging arms, and legs shown in profile. He has a beard or a chin or neck running into a V-shaped neckline of his clothing. Attached to his head are two horn-like volutes. The figure is bound across his stomach as well as at his wrists and legs by rings attached to a circular strap. Between his feet is the apex of a band molding, which might have been part of the scene below, now broken away. The carving is generally understood to depict the Bound Evil, which is based partly on the interpretation of the volutes next to the head as horns. The lack of parallels for depicting the Devil with horns turning downwards was pointed out by Bailey (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 121). Considering the unusual horns of the otherwise rather similar male figure on the Gainford shaft fragment (see below), the position of the horns may be of no significance for the identification of the image. Any further identification of the figure as Satan, Loki, or the damned in hell seems not only impossible, but probably also unnecessary, considering the mixed origin of this iconographical pattern.

A small fragment of a shaft from Gainford in Co. Durham (no. 4, face C; Figure 36) offers a parallel to the iconography of the 'Bound Devil Stone'. Similarly to the Kirkby Stephen carving, it shows a frontal male figure with a beard or chin running into the V-shaped neckline. He also has horn-like features on his head, but they are round, resembling curling hair or buns. The figure has broad shoulders, and he is slightly slanting to his right towards an object that he may be holding in his right hand (possibly a club or a hammer). Through its resemblance to Kirkby Stephen 1, both in its iconography and execution, an interpretation of this carving as a representation of the Bound Evil is a possibility, although the panel is broken above the waistline of the figure, so we have no way of knowing whether he was bound or not. The adjacent side (B) of the same monument offers an iconographical context that may reinforce the interpretation of the carving as the Bound Evil (Figure 37). It shows a bound canine, a dog or wolf, turning upward with its mouth gaping, as if it was howling. Above it is a large bird in profile and probably a snake (or the canine's fetters). If the bound beast is interpreted as Fenrir, we have here a pair of complementary representations of Evil based on or associated with Norse mythology. The third side (A) of the shaft also shows a Scandinavian-style motif: a horseman, with his hair bound in a knot, bearing a spear. The missing part of the shaft may have revealed an interesting iconographical programme that could have contextualized the figures of sides C and B.



Figure 36. Fragment of upper part of cross shaft from Gainford (no. 4C), Co. Durham.



Figure 37. Fragment of upper part of cross shaft from Gainford (no. 4B), Co. Durham.

Monks' Dormitory, Durham Cathedral. First half of tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas.
Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

A further bound canine features on side A of a worn fragment of a cross base from Chester-le-Street in Co. Durham (no. 11; Figure 38). There is a group of human figures standing over the beast. The central figure is somewhat elevated, and next to his face there is a disc. On the left a bearded man in profile is pointing a staff at the face of the central figure. On the right another bearded figure is pointing a pole towards the waist of the man in the middle. Below their feet is the bound canine looking upwards. The carving has been interpreted variously in the scholarly literature. Earlier interpretations of the scene as the seed of Eve bruising the serpent's head (Browne 1883: 185–87, cited in Cramp 1984: 58) or as the Massacre of the Innocents (Cramp 1984: 58) are doubtful. The carving certainly represents a Crucifixion scene with the lance-bearer and the sponge-bearer, and the sun or the moon at Christ's head. The large canine beast at the feet of the three figures represents the Bound Evil (usually depicted as a serpent), possibly in the form of the fettered Fenrir, offering a cross-reference between the two traditions by borrowing a familiar iconographical pattern from the Scandinavian tradition.

A further example of a bound human figure can be found on a tenth-century cross shaft in Great Clifton, Cumbria (no. 1A; Figure 39). The figure at the bottom of the panel is bound in zoomorphic interlace, and possibly there is a



Figure 38. Cross base, Chester-le-Street (no. 11A), Co. Durham. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

snake head above his left ear. Above him, in the upper part of the panel, Jellinge-style ribbon beasts are arranged in two vertical rows. One of them is ridden by a small human figure. While the bound figure offers a possible visual association with the iconography of Loki, the fact that he seems to have a halo speaks against it. It seems more probable that the carving either represents the characteristic Crucifixion type with the bound Christ (discussed above) or an image of Christ battling with serpents (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 111). A similar image of Christ can be found on a cross head from the nearby Brigham (no. 5A; Cumbria). A human figure struggling with snakes might also imply a depiction of the Christian hell, as, for example, on the Rothbury cross (Northumberland) and a group of carvings from Masham and its vicinity (Yorkshire). In spite of the most probably Christian content of the carving, its contemporary audience may well have recognized here an allusion to Scandinavian mythology (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 111).

As this survey has shown, the only insular representation of a bound figure which can be associated with a pagan narrative is the small image on the Gosforth cross, where the accompanying female figure provides additional evidence to identify the scene as Loki's punishment. All other depictions of the Bound Evil



Figure 39. Part of cross shaft,
Great Clifton (no. 1A), Cumbria.
Tenth century. Photo: M. Firby.
Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon
Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

can only be interpreted as the representations of evil in general, due to the lack of specific attributes, but we might suppose a reliance on the iconographical tradition of the depiction of Fenrir and Loki. At Kirkby Stephen and Gainford the images might have been based on representations of the bound Satan according to the Christian tradition, but influenced by the story of Loki. In the Scandinavian tradition horns are not associated with Loki,¹⁶ thus their

¹⁶ There are numerous depictions of human figures with horns and horned headgear from early medieval Scandinavia (with a few related examples of metalwork also from pre-Viking England, e.g. Finglesham, Sutton Hoo, Caenby, Dover). According to a detailed survey by Michaela Helmbrecht, in the Vendel period horned figures, often depicted on war gear, were

origins may lie in Christian representations of the Devil. The Chester-le-Street carving, being a canine beast, seems to go back to the depiction of Fenrir, and it is the iconographical context of the Crucifixion that identifies the image as a representation of evil (specifically in a Christian sense).

Final Encounters: The Events of Ragnarök

The gradually building tension between the gods and their adversaries, both the giants and the monster children of Loki, escalates at the apocalyptic events of Ragnarök, when they meet for a final battle — an encounter that upsets the cosmic balance and results in the end of the world of the gods and men. Ragnarök (ON pl. ‘final destiny of the gods’), the term used in the *Poetic Edda* to denote the eschatological story, is one of the central narratives of Norse mythology. It is frequently alluded to in eddic and skaldic poetry and prefigured in previous narratives of mythic encounters. The story of Ragnarök comprises a series of events, escalating in the final destruction of the world, which has long remained in circulation even after the acceptance of Christianity.

In spite of the significance and popularity of the eschatological story, the surviving narrative source material is rather scanty. The literary sources originate almost exclusively from Iceland and Norway, and many of them have certainly been influenced by Christianity. The eldest and best-known literary source is the *Völuspá*, which presents a more or less coherent eschatological concept. It goes back to an earlier, orally transmitted, lay, the date and original version of which are unknown. This early eschatological account has survived in three different versions: in stanzas 44–66 of the *Völuspá* in the Codex Regius (compiled c. 1270), in a few other stanzas in the *Hauksbók* (1306–08), and as the, now lost, source of Snorri Sturluson’s account on Ragnarök in *Gylfaginning* 51–53 (c. 1220). The composition of the lay as a distinctive piece of oral poetry is generally dated around the year 1000, which leaves a gap of about two hundred years of oral transmission before it was recorded in writing. That may explain the presence of elements of Christian visionary literature that may be detected in certain motifs in stanzas 36–39 (Simek 1995: 330–32 and 463–64; Simek and Pálsson 1987: 151–52; Hultgård 1990: 353).

associated with elite male warriors with close links to Odin, some of them depicted as performing warrior rituals. In the Viking period the horned figures ceased to be used on war gear but they appeared on coins and objects used and even produced by women. An association with the social elite and ritual activities remained, and some cast figures from South Scandinavia may have been associated with Odin himself (Helmbrecht 2008: 48–49).

Chapters 51–53 in Snorri's *Gylfaginning*, a commentated prose version of the *Völuspá* (as well as other sources), deserve special attention, because they give the most complete description of the eschatological events. The original text has been slightly altered, and none of the surviving manuscripts seems to represent Snorri's original version. He describes the four central eschatological events of Ragnarök (the terrible winter, the all-destroying fire by Surt, the sinking of the earth in the surrounding ocean, and the darkening of the sun) alongside a number of other related scenes, as well as the emerging of a new world. Snorri was a conscious mythographer with a Christian background who systematized and rationalized the information he learned from his sources. Following the *Völuspá*, he included a passage on heaven and hell after the fall of the gods and the destruction of the world by fire. It has been interpreted as a Christian influence on his account, which has been extended by A. Olrik (1922) to other elements of his narrative as well, such as the moral decay of the world, the sounding of Heimdall's Gjallarhorn, the darkening of the sun, the world fire, and the emerging of the new world.

Further allusions to the eschatological events are known from the eddic poems *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Lokasenna*, and *Baldrs draumar*. The dates of composition of these lays are unknown; they had all been transmitted orally in Iceland before they were recorded in writing in Christian times. There is a minor eschatological section also in *Hyndluljóð* (stanzas 42–44), formerly part of an independent poem known to Snorri as 'the short *Völuspá*' (Hultgård 1990: 350). It was preserved in the *Flateyjarbók* in the late fourteenth century, but it is presumably much older (cf. Snorri's use of the text) (Simek 1995: 208–09). Skaldic poetry also contains a number of allusions to the events of Ragnarök. While the date and authorship of these skaldic stanzas can often be established, the context or a full narrative is usually missing, thus we have to rely on Snorri or the *Völuspá* to interpret these allusions.

Insular Evidence and the Iconography of the Gosforth Cross

Taking the Scandinavian sources into account, there are a number of questions to be considered when interpreting the insular visual material. Did the Anglo-Saxons and the invading Scandinavians possess an eschatological tradition of similar extent and coherence as the one presented in Snorri? Were their traditions corresponding or were there significant differences? Which narrative tradition is depicted on the Gosforth cross and other insular monuments? These are important philological considerations that we need to keep in mind, but due to the lack of written narrative sources from the British Isles, we have to rely on

Scandinavian textual evidence of later date to understand and reconstruct the eschatological story. A minor piece of insular literary evidence of the tenth-century Scandinavian settlers' acquaintance with the Ragnarök events is provided by the skaldic poem *Eiríksmál*, which mentions that heroes taken to Valhalla will take part in the final battle against the forces of evil at Ragnarök, but reveals no further details of the story.

Sculptural evidence from the Isle of Man provides further proof that the events of Ragnarök were known in the British Isles. The above-mentioned Thorwald's Cross from Andreas (no. 128 (102)) shows Odin being devoured by Fenrir. The unusual depiction of a man with a sword and what looks like a long Alpine horn on a cross slab fragment from Jurby (no. 127 (99)) depicts Heimdall sounding his Gjallarhorn which marks the beginning of the apocalyptic battle (Kermode 1907: 188)¹⁷ — an episode also paralleled on the Gosforth cross.

The northern English material comprises three carvings that may depict events of Ragnarök: the cross-shaft fragment from Ovingham (no. 1, Northumberland), the graffiti slab of Skipwith (no. 1, Eastern Yorkshire), and the Gosforth cross (no. 1, Cumbria). The iconography, admittedly problematic, of Ovingham and Skipwith have already been discussed above in connection with the iconography of Fenrir. Some parts of the Gosforth cross have also been examined, but its overall iconographical programme deserves a detailed analysis.

The Gosforth cross, still standing in situ in the churchyard of St Mary's, is dated to the first half of the tenth century and was created by the so-called Gosforth Master, an anonymous sculptor also responsible for the 'Fishing Stone' (no. 6) and the 'Saint's Tomb' (no. 5) (Bailey and Lang 1975). The monument is truly Christian in its shape and location, but not in the iconography of its figural carvings. The only Christian scene on the cross (briefly discussed above in the Introduction) is located on the lower half of the east side (C; Figure 30). It shows a framed and crossless Crucifixion with two attendant figures, Longinus and a woman, placed outside of the frame. Below them are two entwined beasts with open jaws. Most of the other scenes on the cross refer to Ragnarök or relevant mythological episodes leading directly up to it. The most obvious Ragnarök scene is the one in the upper half of the east face depicting Vidar's killing of Fenrir as a revenge of Odin's death (discussed above). It shows two interlaced beasts with large heads and gaping jaws, one facing up, the other facing down. Vidar is depicted with his foot in the lower beast's jaw while gripping its upper

¹⁷ The position of the figure at the top of the slab between the cross arms recalls the Christian motif of cockerels at the top of other crosses (at Michael 129 (101), Bride 124 (97), and Andreas 131 (103)) (Margeson 1983: 96).

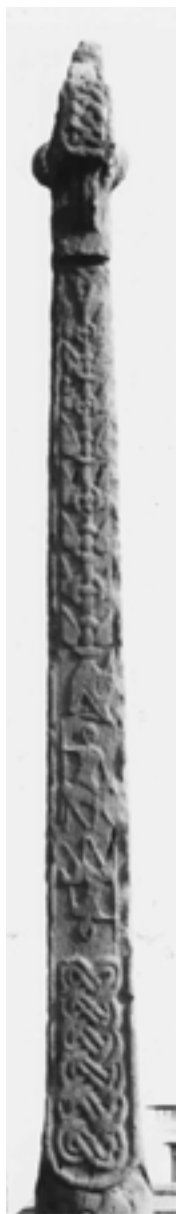


Figure 40. Cross shaft and head, Gosforth (no. 1D, north), Cumbria. First half of tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

jaw. In his other hand he is holding a spear. The arrangement of this side suggests a connection between this scene and the Crucifixion. Since Vidar, son of the chief god, is said to be the destroyer of the eschatological beast, the symbol of evil, as well as the divine saviour and survivor who will rule the new world, his eschatological role is similar to that of Christ, and the two scenes suggest a similar victory over the forces of evil and chaos.

The second most conclusive side is A (west), where the figural scene at the bottom shows the bound Loki with his wife Sigyn (Figure 34). Above it is an upside-down horseman with a spear in his hand, paralleled by three others on faces B and D. The frontal male figure with a horn and a spear or staff on the same side (A) is Heimdall, whose Gjallarhorn marks the beginning of the final battle. He is facing a group of three beasts, two of which are facing downward towards him, while the largest, ring-chain-bodied beast is facing upward. All three have large heads with large teeth.

Besides the identifiable scenes on the two dominant faces of the cross, further elements from the northern (D) and southern (B) sides may contribute to the pictorial narrative of Ragnarök. On side D the large ring-chain-bodied and winged beast facing downward has been interpreted as Surt, the fire beast/giant and apocalyptic enemy of Freyr (Bailey in Bailey and Cramp 1988: 102) (Figure 40).¹⁸ Below the beast's open jaws are two horseman, the lower one set upside-down. As noted, they are identical with the ones on sides A and B, and may recall both the pagan and the Christian apocalyptic scenes (depicting the Norse *einherjar* or the apocalyptic riders of the Christian tradition).

¹⁸ It is hard to say whether the numerous beasts in the upper part of the shaft should really be identified with particular mythological characters. They may be representations of the monstrous enemy in general at the final battle, counterbalancing the riders, or simply decorative ornaments as on many other Viking-Age carvings.

The iconography of face B (south) is more ambiguous. In the upper part of the shaft there are two large beasts facing upward (Figure 31). The head of the lower one is surrounded or bound by a ring or circle. This might be a depiction of Fenrir swallowing the sun (represented by the circle). Below the beasts is a hart facing right. Underneath is an upward-running dog or wolf with a tangle of interlace next to it, and below that a horseman with a spear. The latter has been interpreted as a possible representation of Odin with the wolf Garm above, but the panel also recalls associations with Fenrir (see above). At the very bottom of the panel, below a serpentine interlace divider, there is a figure with open jaws and a prominent eye whose limbs are interlaced, and his body turns into a serpentine shape. Calverley (1899: 149) suggested an interpretation of Mimir with Odin's eye. At first sight it seems as if the human figure were battling a serpent, so the apocalyptic encounter of Thor and the Midgard serpent has also been proposed as a possible interpretation. The creature resembles a variety of figures entangled with snakes, but no conclusive parallels can be offered.

The uniqueness of the Gosforth cross lies in its complex iconographical programme built on a combination of scenes from the pagan Scandinavian and the Christian 'end times' or major bordering events. The basic parallel is suggested on side C, probably the principal face of the monument, through a visual pairing of the crucified Christ and the victorious Vidar. The extension of the parallel of these two scenes by a series of other mythological references in the iconographical programme of the whole artefact implies a connection between the end of not only two, but three different worlds: (1) that of Odin and the pagan gods (Ragnarök), (2) the end of the world of sin by the First Coming of Christ and his Crucifixion, and (3) the apocalyptic end of the world (the Second Coming of Christ). These three events are paralleled with each other not only on the basis of being historical border events, but also by a series of concrete linking elements.¹⁹ Through these links the chronology of the Christian events (i.e. in our understanding the Crucifixion is clearly past and the apocalypse is yet to come) becomes dissolved when Ragnarök is fused into the Christian narrative, and the three end-time stories are presented as one fabric of events without reference to time. By utilizing the possibilities and openness of visual representation, where there is no prescribed order of observation, as opposed to the temporally bound verbal presentation, where statements are necessarily uttered in sequential order, the chronology and temporality of events in a modern sense is dissolved, the

¹⁹ Typological parallels between the First and Second Comings of Christ and the accounts of the Crucifixion and the apocalypse have long been explored by Christian exegetes. The interesting feature here is the close parallel of a third, non-Christian narrative.

three historically distinct temporal layers are united, and the narratives mutually enrich each other.

The links or parallels implied in the iconographical programme range from comparable eschatological roles of characters (e.g. Vidar-Christ) through narrative parallels (e.g. the bound evil that later breaks free, riders, sounding of the horn) to recurring natural phenomena (e.g. fire, earthquake, darkening of the sun). In the following some of these links that interconnect the three events will be examined in detail.

The Gosforth Crucifixion Image Revisited

The starting point of our examination is the Crucifixion scene, the only Christian image on the cross (Figure 2). Its significance as a link between the different narratives is indicated visually in two ways: by a significant alteration in the traditional Crucifixion iconography and by positioning the image on the same face as the Vidar scene.

As I have noted in the Introduction, the Gosforth Crucifixion image is familiar yet unusual in some ways. Christ is depicted in cruciform posture but crossless, grasping a rectangular frame. He is accompanied by a man with a spear (left) and a pigtailed female figure in a trailing dress holding an object (right). The presence of the two attendant figures suggests a traditional three-figure type of Crucifixion iconography, but the attendant figures are excluded from the frame around the crucified Christ. The exclusion invites a possible division of the image into two parts: the figure of Christ, and the pair of facing male and female figures. The division may have been necessitated by the narrow shape of the cross shaft; nonetheless, it strangely brings together the two attendant figures who are normally separated by the cross. The two parts of the image are no doubt connected by a subtle visual marker: the upright spear of the male figure. It crosses the bottom of the frame, and either is thrust into Christ's right side or meets a line of blood bursting out of there (or both, of course). The other peculiarity concerns the identity of the attendant figures. The tradition of Crucifixion iconography supports the identification of the male figure with the spear as the Roman centurion Longinus, the lance-bearer, but he should be paired with Stephaton, the sponge-bearer, according to standard depictions.²⁰ The same logic would prompt

²⁰ The depiction of the crucified Christ with the lance-bearer, together with the ringed cross head of the monument, points to Celtic artistic influence on the Gosforth artist. The majority of Crucifixion depictions on Celtic crosses are of the type with the two soldiers, usually accompanied by two angels and/or the sun and the moon. Examples include the Muiredach cross and three more crosses from Monasterboice, the Kells cross from Ireland, and the Calf

the identification of the female character as the Virgin Mary, the most common female attendant figure, but iconographical tradition would require St John to be her companion. At this point the carving seems to suggest the mixing of two different conventions of three-figure Crucifixion iconography, both common in Anglo-Saxon art (Christ-Mary-John and Christ-Longinus-Stephaton). While the identification of Longinus is clearly supported by iconographical and textual tradition,²¹ the identity of the female figure is problematic. Her position on Christ's left and her holding a horn-like object clearly distinguish her from images of the Virgin Mary at the cross, who normally stands on Christ's right and is occasionally depicted holding a book in early medieval art. The object in the Gosforth lady's hand has prompted two interpretations within the Christian iconographical scheme: as Ecclesia and as Mary Magdalene.

It was Knut Berg (1958: 31) who suggested that the female figure accompanying the Gosforth Crucifixion was intended to be Ecclesia with a chalice. The representation of Ecclesia, the personification of the Church, is very rare in Anglo-Saxon art. There are only two possible examples, both from the eleventh century: the initial to Psalm 51 in the Bury Psalter (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Regin. lat. 12, fol. 62^r), which shows a woman seated on a throne with a crown and sceptre, and less likely in the Crucifixion image on p. 53 of the Sherborne Missal (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422), where a single female character on Christ's right is pointing at the blood flowing from his side. A chalice is absent in both images.²² If the Gosforth lady were indeed Ecclesia, she should be placed on the other side of Christ so as to be able to catch his blood (a reference to the Eucharist) — although that spot is more logically and necessarily taken by Longinus piercing Christ's side.²³ The pairing of the two figures,

of Man Crucifixion from the Isle of Man. The famous eighth-century Athlone plaque (from St John's, Rinnagan near Athlone) should also be noted here as one of the earliest Irish examples, together with the Crucifixion page of the Durham Gospels (Durham Cathedral Library, MS A. II. 17, fol. 38^v; late seventh or early eighth century). Cf. Kaufmann 2003: 17–23.

²¹ The canonical gospel account of John 19. 31–37 records the piercing of Christ by a Roman soldier. His name, Longinus, is first mentioned in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus 7. 8, a text that was well known in Anglo-Saxon England.

²² Although the chalice is missing, a sacramental reference, and thus a link to Ecclesia, may be indicated in the Sherborne Missal by pointing at the blood (the wine of the Eucharist) and by the position of the drawing at the *Te igitur* of the mass which relates to the Eucharist (Raw 1990: 151–52). The interpretation of both the Bury Psalter and the Sherborne Missal images as Ecclesia is uncertain. Both are rejected in favour of the Virgin Mary by E. Temple (1976: 100 and 121) and the latter by B. Raw (1990: 155).

²³ The Gospel text (John 19. 34) does not specify on which side Christ was pierced. Exegetes of the early Church assumed that the wound was on the right side; this is the tradition

Longinus and Ecclesia, is unusual, although they are connected by the blood of Christ, brought forth by Longinus's spear and caught in Ecclesia's chalice. Such an interpretation would suggest a symbolic function of the Crucifixion image on the cross with a focus on the Eucharist and the mystery of the Mass.

Richard Bailey based his more generally accepted interpretation on the shape of the object in the Gosforth lady's hand.²⁴ He argued, together with R. Reitzenstein before him, that the object is an alabastron, a container of oil or ointment, the attribute of Mary Magdalene, and thus the two attendant figures are types of the converted heathen (Reitzenstein 1926: 161 in Berg 1958: 29; Bailey 1974: I, 320–21; 1980: 130; 1996a: 89; Bailey and Cramp 1988: 102). Longinus as a converted soldier and warrior probably had a special appeal in Anglo-Saxon England, and he appears in numerous insular Crucifixion images, mainly from the earlier period.²⁵ Mary Magdalene also appears in the context of Crucifixion iconography in Anglo-Saxon art, namely in the Weingarten Gospels (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 709, fol. 1^v), where she is depicted (unlike on the Gosforth cross) as a penitent figure kneeling at Christ's feet. The

also represented by Bede in his commentary on the Temple (*De templo*, chap. 8) and implied in *The Dream of the Rood*, line 20 (Swanton 1987: 113). In insular art we find representations of Longinus both on Christ's left (e.g. St Gall Gospels (St Gall Abbey Library, MS 51), p. 266, or the Muiredach cross, Monasterboice, Ireland) and on his right (e.g. Durham Gospels, fol. 38^r, or the Calf of Man Crucifixion, Isle of Man).

²⁴ In the present state of the carving, the exact shape of the object is far from obvious. Indeed it seems to be broader at the bottom, but further details may have been added by painting the stone. Collingwood's drawing from the 1920s, frequently reproduced to accompany modern discussions of the cross, shows a fairly long, slightly curving object with a bulb-like bottom. Bailey argued that the object is not a drinking horn but an alabastron; for Berg it was a chalice. Although in its present state the object does not resemble typical conical drinking horns, I do believe that it does depict a drinking vessel. The association of the figure with depictions of valkyries (see the Introduction and below) does not depend on the exact shape of the object; the Scandinavian comparative material suggests a variety of shapes held by 'valkyrie' figures. There can be little doubt, even in fully Christian interpretations, that the Gosforth lady's object is a container of liquids. For further discussion of the significance of a drinking vessel see below.

²⁵ While the image of the crucified Christ accompanied by the two soldiers, instead of Mary and John, is common in early Anglo-Saxon art, it is increasingly rare in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Raw 1990: 150). The only manuscript example is fol. 13^r of the Tiberius Psalter (London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius C. VI; in Raw 1990: 88, 150, and Plate XIII), and there are two late tenth- or early eleventh-century ivories (Beckwith 1990 [1972]: cat. nos. 33 and 34). From the sixty surviving stone monuments with Crucifixions from the late ninth to eleventh centuries (based on Coatsworth 1988: 163) only six show the iconographical type with the soldiers: Romsey (Hampshire) and Nassington (Northamptonshire) from southern and eastern England, and Alnmouth (Northumberland), Aycliffe (Durham), Penrith (Cumbria), and Gosforth (Cumbria) from the iconographically more conservative north.

smaller scale of the figure compared to the standard attendant figures in the picture, the Virgin Mary and St John, as well as her act of devotion suggest that the figure is a disguise for the pious donor of the artefact, Judith of Flanders (Raw 1990: 24 and pl. XVI).²⁶ The pairing of Longinus and Mary Magdalene at the Gosforth Crucifixion (in the absence of other attendant figures) would be unique in the insular art of the time period.²⁷ Only one possible parallel has so far been suggested: the carving on a fragmental disc-headed cross slab in Llangan (no. 1), Glamorgan (Wales). The round slab (dated from the late ninth to the eleventh century) displays a Crucifixion scene with Irish stylistic elements. Below the crucified Christ, attended by the figures of the lance-bearer and the sponge-bearer, is a very worn, frontal figure with extended arms, holding a small cylindrical object in the right hand and a curved horn or bow in the left. Based on the (extremely vague) resemblance to the Gosforth lady, it has been suggested that the figure possibly depicts Mary Magdalene with an ointment jar (Seaborne 1999: 32–33; Redknap and Lewis 2007: 337–39). This interpretation seems highly doubtful considering the figure appears to have a beard (and big ears) and bears great resemblance to Christ in his facial features. Holding two objects in extended arms would also be unusual for a depiction of Mary Magdalene.²⁸

²⁶ E. Temple (1976: 109) rejects the interpretation of the figure as Mary Magdalene on the grounds that it would be by far the earliest representation of the saint in this scene and pose. However, the interpretation of the female figure as the donor posing as Mary Magdalene is supported by another Anglo-Saxon artefact: on the (now lost) embroidered alb of Edith of Wilton, the donor (Edith herself) also appeared in the disguise of the penitent Mary Magdalene at the feet of Christ among the apostles. A description of the alb survives in Goscelin of Saint-Bertin's *De Sancta Editha virgine et abbatissa* I. iv. 16 (Wilmart 1938: 79; Hollis and others 2004: 48, *The Vita of Edith*, chap. 16: 79).

²⁷ A continental parallel is offered by an eleventh-century ivory book cover, probably from Cologne, where Mary Magdalene (with an ointment jar) appears together with St John (with a book). They are standing next to each other on the right of the crucified Christ. Other attendant figures are missing because the other side of the cross (Christ's left) is taken up by a separate image of the visit of the women to Christ's tomb where the same female figure is repeated. A chalice is placed at the root of Christ's cross in reference to Ecclesia (Goldschmidt 1969–70: II, 27, no. 48, and pl. XV). A much later, but insular, parallel is provided by a late twelfth-century walrus ivory Crucifixion from Dublin (Beckwith 1990: 144, cat. no. 109, ill. 208), where a female figure with a jar of ointment (one of the Maries, possibly Mary Magdalene) appears on Christ's left under the cross, turning her body away from Christ. Other possible attendant figures are missing due to the fragmentary nature of the carving.

²⁸ Other interpretations of the figure include Adam (for mankind), St Peter, and King David (Redknap and Lewis 2007: 339).

The interpretation of the female figure as Mary Magdalene adds a historical emphasis to the Crucifixion image on the cross. With Longinus and Mary Magdalene being the first witnesses of Christ's death and Resurrection respectively, the emphasis is on the historical reality of the biblical events: the Crucifixion of Christ and the subsequent miracle of the Resurrection which necessitated his death. The victorious Christ on the cross also foreshadows his Second Coming at the apocalypse, linking the promise of the future with the events of the past. This historical orientation is in line with the overall iconographical programme of the cross which explores the relations of not only these two milestone events of salvation history but the relation of three different epochs marked by end-time events (see above). The two attendant figures as archetypes of converts extend the historical reality of the image to the viewer's present and invite the viewer to follow their examples. The image thus acquires a devotional function and elicits response and engagement from the viewer.

As noted above, the image of the Gosforth lady also recalls Scandinavian depictions of female cup-bearing figures usually interpreted as valkyries receiving dead warriors in Valhalla (in particular if accompanied by a facing male figure). Julian Richards (2000: 163) suggested that the Gosforth image offered a combined representation of Mary Magdalene dressed as a valkyrie, which would bridge the two traditions. Similarly, A. B. Cook (1925: 305) proposed a double meaning for the Crucifixion image (and all other scenes on the cross), interpreting all three figures both in Christian terms, as Christ, Longinus, and Mary Magdalene, and in pagan terms, as Balder, Höd, and Balder's wife Nanna.²⁹ It seems obvious that the Gosforth Master, who was equally familiar with traditional Crucifixion iconography and the story of Ragnarök, deliberately altered the conventional Christian image and inserted a visual link in the person of the female figure to the rest of the carvings on the cross. The exclusion of the attendant figures from the frame of Christ may suggest that they should be interpreted as part of a related but separate scene. The visual separation distances the image from traditional Christian iconography and invites a possible association with the Scandinavian iconographical tradition. An informed observer of the monument who had

²⁹ C. A. Parker and W. S. Calverley, who first offered an interpretation of the mythological iconography of the cross in the 1880s, interpreted the 'Crucifixion image' as part of the Ragnarök cycle. Accordingly, the crucified figure represents either Odin or Balder or Heimdall, or all three in one, the spear-bearer is the blind god Höd, and the female figure Nanna, Balder's wife (Calverley 1899: 157). A Christian interpretation of the carving is more favourable because of convincing iconographical parallels in Christian art and the location of the carving on the lower part of the east side of the cross which is frequently dedicated to the image of the Crucifixion on pre-Conquest stone monuments.

the knowledge to decipher the rest of the mythological carvings did certainly recognize this visual hint. The reference to a 'valkyrie' enriches the meaning of the whole Crucifixion scene by suggesting an interpretation of Christ as a triumphant warrior hero, as He is often depicted in Old English poetry, and possibly even a parallel between Odin and Christ.

An association between Odin and Christ has long been recognized on the basis of a number of similarities between the two deities. The Anglo-Saxon understanding of Christ as both triumphant warrior and sacrificial victim offers an obvious parallel to the two sides of Odin. Odin was, among many others, the god of war and patron of heroic warriors. He gathered those who died a violent death in his service, in battle or at sacrifice, in Valhalla, and they were to fight with him in the final battle at Ragnarök. Similarly, in the insular tradition Christ was often depicted as a triumphant warrior and a leader of his faithful followers; a true 'lord' in the Germanic sociopolitical sense. His death on the cross was, however, also seen as a self-sacrifice, which reminds us of Odin's ritual self-sacrifice on the world ash Yggdrasil to receive the runes (for a detailed discussion, see the next chapter). Both Christ and Odin suffered sacrificial deaths by being hung on a tree, which suggests a parallel between the cross as the world tree or the Tree of Life and its Germanic equivalent, Yggdrasil. The Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood* uses the words *treow*, 'tree, wood', and *beam*, 'beam, wood, tree', with deliberate ambiguity to represent the cross of Christ's Crucifixion, which is first depicted as a tree growing in the forest and retains the aspect of a living being throughout the poem. Christ's death on the cross by a soldier's spear³⁰ and the presence of the lance-bearer in the Crucifixion depiction recall not only Odin's ritual self-sacrifice on Yggdrasil (also pierced by a spear), but also the ritual of dedication by spear (and hanging), a rite associated with Odin (cf. Davidson 1964: 51; Schjødt 2007). The visual echo of a valkyrie receiving the heroic victim in Valhalla is therefore not entirely out of context here.

The female figure accompanying the dying Christ may have evoked another association in the minds of an audience well versed in the Norse mythological tradition: the image of the goddess Hel, ruler of the underworld, and sister of Fenrir and the Midgard serpent. So far no iconographical representation of Hel has been identified from the Viking period, but in eddic and skaldic poetry there are numerous occurrences of the word *Hel* and a variety of kennings that seem to denote Hel (as the goddess or her realm) (Abram 2006: 2). Christopher Abram's thorough analysis has revealed an interesting dichotomy between the conceptions of Hel that pertain in the eddic and early skaldic sources: in the

³⁰ See the Introduction, note 2.

eddic texts Hel denotes a particular place within the mythic cosmos associated with the dead, while in ninth- and tenth-century skaldic poetry she appears as ‘a female mythological figure who serves as a personification, not of the realm, but of death itself’ (2006: 22). The kennings in these skaldic texts indicate that the poets were familiar with Hel’s familial relationship to Loki and to his monstrous offspring,³¹ and her figure was closely connected with the concept of death, but in several instances her character appears to be simply a personification of death (in Þjóðólfr ór Hvínir’s *Ynglingatal* 30 possibly a personification of the grave) rather than that of a goddess or the realm of the dead. Based on the evidence of skaldic verse (of Egill Skalla-Grímsson in particular), Abram concludes that ‘in the middle part of the tenth century, a mythological figure named Hel had a function as a poetic personification of death, independent of the realm of the dead’ (2006: 19). Not only is the Gosforth cross contemporary with the skaldic poems in question, but Egill’s connection to the court of York³² provides a direct geographical link with England and a possible path of transmission of such ideas. Could the Gosforth lady be a visual representation of a similar concept of Hel as a personification of death? The moment captured in the Crucifixion image is exactly the moment of death by piercing. As opposed to Snorri’s claim that only those who die of sickness and old age belong to the realm of Hel, references in eddic poetry suggest that those who ‘go to Hel’ often die a violent death (Abram 2006: 11). Therefore the figure of Hel as a personification of death is not at variance with the violent context of the Crucifixion.

The image of Hel as cup-bearing hostess also finds support in the literary sources. In *Baldrs draumar* the soon to be deceased Balder is awaited with freshly brewed mead in the decked hall of Hel (although, admittedly, the lady of the hall never appears in the text, maybe because Odin is not admitted into the hall). Similarly, in the eleventh-century skaldic verse of Þorbjörn Brúnason (*Lausavísa* 1) Hel also appears as a hostess (as interpreted by Larrington 2006: 542). References to the hall or halls of Hel in eddic poetry seem to be based on the same idea of a hostess or *húsfreyja* welcoming her guests — a reflection of the traditional role of noble women as cup-bearers in Germanic society (Larrington

³¹ See Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa* 9 (dated 800–50); Þjóðólfr ór Hvínir’s *Ynglingatal* 7, 10, 31, 32 (dated before 900); Egill Skalla-Grímsson’s *Höfuðlausn* 10 (dated 936) and *Sonatorrek* 25 (dated 960). Cf. Abram 2006: 12, table 2.

³² *Höfuðlausn*, the very text that, according to *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* 61–62, saved the poet’s life from Erik Bloodaxe’s rage at York, contains a reference to Hel in stanza 10 as *nípt Nara* ‘sister of Nari [Loki’s son]’.

2006: 542). As noted above, in the context of the Gosforth cross many scholars have pointed out the unusual shape of the object proffered by the female figure and questioned its being a mead-cup or drinking horn.³³ However, the logic of the carver's modification of the Crucifixion image does support its interpretation as a drinking vessel. The Gosforth Master substituted the female figure in place of the traditional companion of the lance-bearer: Stephaton, the sponge-bearer, who offered a bitter drink to the dying Christ. The substitution of a female figure for the drink-bearer seems culturally appropriate. The idea of the Cup of Death, together with the description of death as a bitter drink or fatal draught, seems to have had its origin in Germanic culture even before the arrival of Christianity with its biblical and patristic concept of the *poculum mortis* (Brown 1940: 398–99). As Carleton Brown (1940) argued, numerous references to the Cup (or Drink) of Death as a symbol of death and mortality can be found in Old English, Anglo-Latin, and Old High German literature, which points to the widespread importance of this image.³⁴ The object in the Gosforth lady's hand is therefore a drinking vessel, representing the drink offered in the moment of death as a sign of mortality. The image of the woman proffering the cup thus personifies death in a genuinely Germanic manner, and her presence underlines the significance of the moment of Christ's death. To the Gosforth carver, the traditional image of the sponge-bearer, transformed here into the figure of the female cup-bearer, signified more than an act of malevolence towards the suffering Christ: it was the perfect counterpart of the lance-bearer, both representing the moment of death of the Son of Man.³⁵

The New Generation

Besides Odin, a number of other Norse gods have also been associated with Christ through the nature of his death and his return at the apocalypse. The most obvious association is between Christ and Vidar, which is supported by

³³ See Chapter 2, note 24.

³⁴ The concept of 'tasting death' (or the related idea of 'bitter death') occurs in *The Dream of the Rood* 101 and 113–14, *Christ* 1474–75, *Daniel* 223, and the Vercelli homilies IV and XVII. Alongside the Germanic connotations, the concept is rooted in the common biblical association with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and the New Testament verses of Matthew 16. 28 and Mark 9. 1 (Swanton 1987: 133; Thompson 2004: 168).

³⁵ It is important to note that the Crucifixion lady is not the only cup-bearing female figure on the cross. Loki's wife, Sigyn, also appears with a cup/bowl on face A (directly corresponding to the Crucifixion image of face C; Figure 34). She is catching up a poisonous liquid, the venom of the serpent, to avoid the death of Loki. See more in Chapter 3.

the visual parallel and layout of side C (Figure 30). Both characters are depicted as being involved in a concrete or symbolic fight with beasts: Vidar's foot is in the jaws of the beast, while the three-figure Crucifixion scene is positioned over an intertwined double-headed serpentine creature which could be a general reference to the defeated evil, as it is known from Carolingian and later art (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 101), or it might contain a hint to the two beasts of the apocalypse in Revelation 13. Vidar, son of the chief god, is depicted avenging his father's death by killing the monster of evil and death. In this apocalyptic function he shows traits of a saviour figure, and similarly to Christ, he survives the apocalypse and emerges triumphantly.

Some aspects of the figure of Christ recall another famous son of Odin, Balder, who does not appear on the cross, but whose death, which is considered to mark the beginning of the Ragnarök events, is implied by the depiction of Loki's punishment for his murder. The son of the Christian God also suffers a violent death on the cross as a result of Judas's betrayal, similarly to Balder's death that was brought about by the treachery of Loki and executed through the hands of the blind Höd. Both god-sons descend to the otherworld (Hel vs hell) upon their deaths but keep an 'aspect of a living man' (Davidson 1964: 36) and return from death to reign in the new world. The association of Balder with Christ is attested in medieval Scandinavia (cf. Davidson 1964: 108–10), but the status of Balder as a god among the early Anglo-Saxons is unclear. It seems that the stories of his murder as well as Loki's punishment may have been imported to England by the Viking settlers (Owen 1981: 26–27). Two brief references in *The Dream of the Rood*, line 55b ('weop eal gesceaft', 'all creation wept') and line 62b ('eall ic wæs mid strælum forwundod', 'I was all wounded with darts/arrows'), bear witness to a possible association between the deaths of Balder and Christ in Anglo-Saxon England. The lament of all creation was of course also a familiar feature of classical elegies, and it was commonly used in contemporary Christian literature (cf. *Christ* 1127–30, or the homilies of Ælfric). The latter use may have originated in the Crucifixion homilies of Leo the Great or in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus (Swanton 1987: 123). While the image is not unique to the poem, a dual reference to both traditions, pagan and Christian, could well have been noted by the contemporary audience. The phrase may thus indicate a coalescence of the two traditions (Pope 1966: 67), which is further supported by the heroic imagery of the poem in general.³⁶ The function

³⁶ Swanton considers line 62b a heroic metaphor for 'nails' (thus the plural form), or alternatively a reference to the soldier's spear. For further parallels, see Swanton 1987: 125–26.

of possible references to Balder in a Christian poem might have been to enrich the Christian story by bringing the tragedy of Christ's heroic death closer to the contemporary audience and to generate empathy.

The Ends of Worlds: Ragnarök and the Christian Tradition

The iconographical programme of the cross brings together three different narratives about the end of worlds and eras: the story of Ragnarök, the end of the world of sin by Christ's death on the cross, and the Christian apocalypse. In addition to the parallels with the figure of Christ himself, various other points of overlap or similarities between the three narratives are revealed on the other sides of the cross and underlie the choice of the remaining scenes.

The depiction of Heimdall with his horn on face A, referring to his sounding of Gjallarhorn to mark the beginning of Ragnarök, echoes the trumpets of the apocalypse. The bound Loki is depicted at the bottom of the same face. The significance of this scene in the present context is double. On the one hand, it references the death of Balder, the initial act of the impending doom of the gods, and the subsequent punishment of the evil-doer (later the leader of the evil forces at the final battle). On the other hand, Loki's association with earthquakes (his reaction to the pain caused by the venom being the explanation for earthquakes in the pagan north) recalls the references to earthquakes in both biblical narratives (Matthew 27. 54; Revelation 6. 12, 8. 5, 11. 13, 16. 18). As we have seen above, the iconography of the bound Loki, together with the bound Fenrir, may be associated with that of the Bound Devil of the apocalypse (Revelation 20. 2–3), which idea is further supported by the existence of other carvings from the period with this motif. Fenrir himself is present on the cross (in his encounter with Vidar), and a parallel with the apocalyptic beasts has already been suggested above. The darkening of the sun (swallowed by the wolf) and the falling of the stars as natural phenomena also connect the different stories (cf. Mark 13. 24–25), together with the all-destroying fires (associated with Surt in the Norse context). The four identical riders may depict the warriors of the final battle, but their number also coincides, whether intentionally or not, with the four riders of the apocalypse.

Some of the overlaps between the Christian and the Norse stories of end-time events are due undoubtedly to the influence of Christianity on the eschatological story of Ragnarök. Through the influence of Christianity the pagan story may have acquired new elements, and several authentic (pre-Christian) elements of the eschatological narrative may have been given more prominence. Elements of

Christian influence on the pagan eschatological story, as recorded in the literary sources, can certainly be seen in the portents — the decline of morals, hatred between men, brothers fighting their brothers, murder and incest — as well as in the idea of punishment for the wicked and reward for the good (Turville-Petre 1964: 282) and the renewal of the world with an emphasis on nature (cf. Revelation 21. 1; Isaiah 65. 17). The selection of the episodes depicted on the Gosforth cross, dated centuries earlier than the Norse written sources, indicates if not the original or ‘untinted’ status of these stories (it is a Christian monument after all), then at least their popularity and significance long before the earliest written narrative sources from Scandinavia.

Even though the knowledge of the Latin sources of the Christian eschatology and apocalypse³⁷ were largely restricted in Viking-Age England to people related to episcopal sees and monasteries, the main ideas may have spread through translations and adaptations into the vernacular, which were used in the education of priests (Hultgård 1990: 347) as well as in the everyday practices of local churches. A special interest in apocalyptic narratives was inspired in Anglo-Saxon England by the widespread fear of the end of the world around the year 1000, although it seems unlikely to be the true motivation behind the creation of the Gosforth cross considering the early to mid-tenth century dating of the monument, an entire generation or more before the impending end of the world. The interest of the Scandinavian settlers of the area around Gosforth in the eschatological narrative may have had more political-historical reasons. As Stephanie Würth (2003: 226, 230–31) has noted, political and social crisis situations may have resulted in an increased interest in stories of the end of the world and its warning signs, since participants in these crisis situations could recognize reflections of their own situations in them. The first half of the tenth century was certainly a politically and socially turbulent period in the northern part of England, in particular in the North-West, characterized by the settlement of the north-western territories by the Hiberno-Norse after the expulsion of the Dublin Norsemen by the Irish, the struggle for the control of Dublin, York, and the northern territories, and the ongoing conflict between the Norsemen and the Irish, Scots, Bernicians, Mercians, and English. This may have provided a particularly receptive cultural context in which the correspondences between the Scandinavian and Christian eschatological narratives, together with other conflicts of mythical significance, were not only noted but also recorded in a visual medium.

³⁷ Matthew 24. 3–44; Mark 13. 5–37; Luke 21. 8–36 (known as the ‘synoptic apocalypse’); judgment teaching in Matthew 25, Daniel 7–12; Revelation of John; and IV Esdras (or The Second Book of Esdras) in the Latin Vulgate.

CROSSING UNCERTAIN BOUNDARIES: PAGAN, SECULAR, OR CHRISTIAN?

In spite of all the uncertainties of interpretation, many of the carvings discussed in the previous two chapters provide enough iconographical details and contextual evidence to associate them, one way or another, with particular mythological or heroic narratives and characters. In this chapter we are entering murkier grounds and will examine figural carvings of uncertain or mixed pictorial and cultural origins. These images do not belong to standard Christian iconography, and many of them display elements of Scandinavian artistic tradition in their iconography and style. However, they lack enough distinguishing features to be linked with certainty with particular mythological or heroic narratives and characters.

Many of the figural carvings in question are warriors, horsemen, and female figures without specific attributes as well as a variety of dragons and serpentine monsters that appear frequently on Viking-Age monuments. The latter group of zoomorphic figures and dragons seems to have had primarily, although not exclusively, decorative roles, while portraits of human figures may have served a variety of functions. They may have depicted heroic characters of special relevance for the patrons, secular portraits of those commemorated by the monuments or of their patrons, or ecclesiastical figures, biblical characters, or local saints. Some may also have been a combination of any of these, mingling and cross-referencing different traditions in a secular or religious context. Imaginative antiquarians suggested various mythological readings for a variety of these carvings that defied interpretation within the realm of traditional Christian iconography. However,

most of them do not have enough distinctive iconographical features to verify Scandinavian mythological or heroic origins. On the other hand, just as these modern interpreters detected potential parallels in those carvings with stories and characters of the Scandinavian tradition, the contemporary audience may also have recognized at least some of them. In the following pages, these potential associations of Viking-Age carvings of uncertain iconography with the Norse mythological tradition (Odin and his warriors, Yggdrasil, the cosmic tree, and a group of female mythological figures) will be explored.

Odin and his Warriors in Anglo-Scandinavian England

By the Viking period at the latest, Odin emerged as the chief god of the Norse pantheon; references to him in Viking-Age insular sculpture are, therefore, not at all surprising. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Odin appears in representations of his death at Ragnarök (swallowed by Fenrir), he is referenced, although not physically present, in Vidar's revenge for his death on the Gosforth cross, and his cult may be alluded to, even if only vaguely, by the act of sacrificial piercing by spear and hanging on a tree in the Gosforth Crucifixion, as well as in images of horsemen (possibly Odin's *einherjar*) on the same monument. A number of other carvings of warriors and horsemen as well as an interesting but problematic image from Kirkbymoorside (Yorkshire) may provide further evidence of his status in Anglo-Scandinavian England.

Odin's functions in Norse mythology and his composite character are fine examples of the changing nature of Germanic religion over time and space. By the time Odin became the chief god of the Norse pantheon, his character seems to have undergone numerous changes. The position of the supreme god, as well as some of his mythological functions, he took over from Tiw, the ancient sky god of early Germanic religion. The influence of Christianity on many of the surviving literary sources makes it difficult to detect the exact nature of pre-Christian beliefs and practices related to Odin, but his figure seems to have united various facets of pagan Scandinavian culture. He was the god of war, wisdom, magic, healing, poetry, and the lord of the dead and the hanged, and he was venerated mainly among warriors and chieftains. An earlier, originally continental manifestation of the god (cf. Old High German *Uuodan*; Old Franconian *Wodan*) was certainly known in the British Isles under the name *Woden* and venerated among the early Anglo-Saxons. The records of his cult are, however, relatively sparse as a result of early Christianization. Under the influence of the Viking settlers who brought along their practices related to the Norse version of the god, Woden's character

and cult might have undergone some changes, as is indicated by a change in the use of the name of the god. In earlier Old English sources as well as in place-names we find *Woden*, while later homilists, notably Ælfric and Wulfstan, called him *Op̃on*. By using the anglicized but Norse form of the name, they either wished to refer to specifically imported Scandinavian practices in connection with the god, or the figure of the native god became fused with its Scandinavian counterpart.¹

Woden seems to have enjoyed great popularity among the early Anglo-Saxons.² His cult flourished in Wessex, Essex, and Kent as the evidence of a dozen known place-names suggests. Furthermore, evidence of metalwork finds attest to his popularity in East Anglia and Kent.³ The Old English word for Wednesday, *wodnesdeg*, indicates his association with the Roman god Mercury as well as his established status in Anglo-Saxon culture alongside the above-mentioned Tiw commemorated in the word 'Tuesday'. It is hard to say how the insular pagans saw Woden, but he certainly had some of the major characteristics we know from the later Scandinavian sources.⁴ He was the god of war, as is suggested by representations of warriors with horned helmets and spears, most likely associated with his cult (e.g. on a buckle from Finglesham, Kent, on the Sutton Hoo helmet, and on the silver foil of Caenby, Lincolnshire) as well as by the association of the so-called beasts of battle (raven, wolf, and eagle), a frequent motif of Old English heroic poetry, with Odin's animals.⁵ His position as the head of the pantheon and

¹ In his *Chronicon*, Æthelweard uses the older West Germanic form *Woddan* once, and in all other cases he has the later anglicized compromise form *Woden* also when talking about English genealogies (Meaney 1966: 110). That the connection between Woden and Odin was probably realized by the contemporaries is supported by a scribal addition in the margin of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 113 of Wulfstan's version of *De falsis diis*, which reads 'Op̃on unde Wodones deg' ('Op̃on, whence Wednesday'), explaining the origin of the word (Johnson 1995: 55).

² On Woden see, among others, Turville-Petre 1964: 70–72; Meaney 1966; Davidson 1969: 225–26; Ström and Biezais 1975: 98–103; Owen 1981: 8–22; Simek 1993: 374; and North 1997: 78–88.

³ I am grateful to Tim Pestell for sharing with me his research on metalwork finds.

⁴ Scandinavian textual sources depict Odin in a variety of ways depending in part on the literary context (cf. Lassen 2006 for a survey of textual figures of Odin). Although we are able to detect consistent elements in these descriptions, the sources often depict considerably divergent portraits of the god, which makes it difficult to reconstruct the pre-Christian concept, or regionally different concepts, of Odin.

⁵ Figures with horned helmets appear on a number of other metal objects, primarily from East Anglia (Attleborough, Letheringsett, Hethel, Reepham, and Saxlingham Nethergate). Other examples have been found in West Ilsley (Berkshire), Soberton (Hampshire), and

the god of chieftains is supported by the fact that the royal families of Wessex, Kent, East Anglia, Bernicia, and Deira all claimed descent from him. He was also associated with the dead: in place-names his name is often combined with the word 'barrow'. In the Old English *Nine Herbs Charm* against poison he appears as a healing magician, which points towards his function as healer and the god of magic. In Ælfric's homily *De falsis diis*, which certainly depicts an already Scandinavian-influenced version of the god, Odin (first identified with Mercury, then also referred to with the 'Danish' word *Oþon*) is described as a trickster who is 'crafty and deceitful in his deeds' and loves 'thievery and deception'. The insular Woden/Odin was also associated with the discovery of the writing of runes: In the prose fragment of *Salomon and Saturn*, he appears (again associated with Mercury) as the founder of letters (line 58; Kemble 1848: 193 and 197; cf. also *Adrian and Ritheus*, line 16, Kemble 1848: 201 and 209). The Old English *Rune Poem* (along with its late Icelandic counterpart) also refers to him as the source of all languages (stanza 4, line 10; Halsall 1981: 110–11).⁶

Outside of the British Isles, Viking-Age pictorial representations of Odin in a context other than the iconography of Ragnarök are known from picture stones from Scandinavia. There he is commonly accompanied by birds and/or by his eight-legged horse Sleipnir (see Alskog Tjängvide I, Ardre VIII, or for a four-legged Sleipnir Tängelgårda I, Gotland),⁷ the triangular *valknut* symbol, or occasionally by wolves or snakes (see Böksta rune stone (U 855), Uppland, Sweden). Dan Robinson (2003–04: 37–39) has recently argued for the presence of a Sleipnir image also in England, on a small carved stone from Shocklach in Cheshire (no. 1 in Bailey 2010: 142–43). The weathered and fragmented carving in question depicts an armed horseman (perhaps with a spear and a shield) accompanied by a bird(?). According to Robinson, his horse 'clearly has more than four legs', which he sees as a reference to Odin's horse and consequently identifies the carving as a

Rempstone (Nottinghamshire). These figures, generally dated to the late sixth and seventh centuries, might be associated with Woden or his followers/warriors, but this identification is uncertain. Further see Pestell (forthcoming) and Helmbrecht (2008).

⁶ Woden's name also appears, in a dismissive manner, in the Old English *Maxims I* of the Exeter Book, where he is mentioned as the maker of idols, and is contrasted with the Christian God, the maker of heaven, following the interpretation of heathen gods according to Psalm 96. 5.

⁷ Jörn Staecker (2006: 364–65) suggested that the eight-legged horse is not necessarily Sleipir but rather his famous offspring Grani, the horse of Sigurd, and therefore the images in the upper part of the Ardre VIII and Alskog Tjängvide I show depictions of the Völsung myth. According to Sune Lindqvist (1941–42: 1, 99–101), the rider on Alskog Tjängvide I might also be a fallen warrior welcomed in Valhalla and the eight legs should be explained by having two horses carrying the dead warrior's bier.

depiction of Odin himself. However, of the seven possible 'legs' one is the rider's leg, one is the horse's long tail (a common element of contemporary images of horses), and the last shorter and thinner curving line does not seem to be part of the horse at all (see Robinson 2003–04: 38, ill. 1 and Bailey 2010: ill. 377). This leaves us with clearly only two front legs, two hind legs, and no extra legs to account for. Therefore an interpretation of the carving as Sleipnir seems unlikely, although the spear and the bird (if indeed there) may promote an association of this probably lay warrior portrait with the iconography of Odin. Richard Bailey (2010: 143) even raised the question whether the weathered piece is indeed of pre-Norman date. The rider's shield might be kite-shaped (rather than round), which would with certainty speak for a post-Conquest dating. As for Sleipnir's legs, since there is no sign of an eight-legged horse associated with Odin in pre-Viking Scandinavia, Davidson argued that it might have been a relatively late conception coming in by way of the Baltic (1967: 125).⁸

The veneration of heroic warriors in Anglo-Scandinavian England is indicated, among others, by numerous images of horsemen and warriors, often depicted with spears and accompanied by birds, which may be a sign of their association with Odin (Davidson 1967: 130; for a discussion see below). The posthumous praise poem in memory of Erik Bloodaxe, *Eiríksmál*, describes Odin welcoming the slain Erik arriving with five other princes in Valhalla. In skaldic poetry composed in England, Odin is mentioned a total of ten times in four different works (Jesch 2001: 319–20), mainly in association with warrior heroes and in kennings for poetry. An unusual Viking burial at Repton (grave 511) may provide further evidence for possible local veneration of Odin (as well as of Thor and Freyr). The male victim of violent death or ritual sacrifice had one eye pierced, suffered a sword blow to his thigh, and may have even been disembowelled and his genitals mutilated. He was buried in a richly furnished grave with the legbone of a jackdaw or raven, possibly associated with Odin, a silver Thor's hammer, a boar's tusk between his legs, possibly associated with Freyr, as well as a sword in a wooden scabbard, two knives and a key, two buckles, possibly a bag or box, and a necklace with two beads (Hadley 2008: 274; Richards 2003: 388; 2005: 71–72). The same site also produced a group of four male sacrificial victims.⁹

⁸ A male figure (usually abbreviated to a head) on a horse accompanied by a bird of prey is one of the most frequent images on Migration-Period gold bracteates (classified as type C, with over four hundred examples). It is commonly interpreted as a depiction of Odin on his horse, accompanied by his raven. In these images the horse only has four legs, of which often only two are visible.

⁹ The graves are associated with the overwintering of the 'great heathen army' in Repton

Among the visual sources the fragmentary slab of Jurby 125 (98) from the Isle of Man may show another aspect of Odin's cult: his association with hangmen. It depicts a man with a pole over his shoulder, from which dangles a body. A similar image is known from Lärbro St Hammars I, Gotland, where a warrior is hanging from a tree, accompanied by an eagle and a flying figure, possibly a valkyrie. Due to Odin's association with hanging, the figure might be identified as Odin, but we cannot be sure because of the fragmentary nature of the slab (Margeson 1983: 96). The slab displays further iconographical elements which might be associated with the figure, a woman in a trailing dress, a boar, and a hart, but there is no way to determine the specific relation of these images.

Sculptural Evidence from Northern England

Even though several Viking-Age carvings display common attributes of Odin (spear, birds, horse), which might prompt an identification of the god or at least that of heroic warriors associated with his cult, none of these carvings can be interpreted with any certainty, and they may just as well show secular depictions using popular iconographical features of the heroic tradition. Nonetheless, it is worth surveying the surviving material briefly, because it reveals the continued use of iconographical elements of a heroic tradition that were, at least at some point, associated with the figure of Odin, even if we cannot identify the presence of any specific narratives or ritual practices related to the god. Viking-period insular carvings associated with the figure of Odin, but not necessarily depicting the god himself, fall into three groups: (1) Ragnarök events, (2) warriors and other figures with attributes associated with Odin, and (3) Odin's self-sacrifice on Yggdrasil.

The first group reveals the familiarity of Anglo-Scandinavian communities with Odin's eschatological role, his death at Ragnarök by being devoured by Fenrir, and Vidar's revenge of his death. The only carving which might actually show the figure of Odin in this context is the graffiti slab of Skipwith (no. 1, Eastern Yorkshire), which depicts a man being swallowed by a giant beast (Figure 32; discussed above). On the Gosforth cross Odin's death is indirectly implied by Vidar's act of revenge. The Crucifixion image and the four horsemen with spears also contain iconographical elements once related to the cult of Odin.

(873–74). See Biddle and Kjolbye-Biddle 2001. The Viking invaders took over the Mercian royal burial site and buried their dead near the shrine of St Wigstan to indicate association with sanctity and continuity of power at the royal centre. Grave 511 was found adjacent to the shrine (Richards 2005: 71–72).

The second group of carvings contains images of men with attributes associated with Odin as god of war and warriors. However, this group is not without problems. Horsemen and warriors in general are not uncommon in Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture; see carvings at Middleton, Weston, Brompton, Nunburnholme, Old Malton, Staveley, Holme-upon-Spalding Moor in Yorkshire, Gainford, Sockburn, Hart, and Chester-le-Street in Co. Durham, Lowther in Cumbria, Neston in Cheshire, and more. In fact, the proliferation of secular and warrior portraits is one of the distinguishing features of Viking-Age sculpture (Bailey 1996a: 84). Depictions of warriors and horsemen may represent a continuation and development of a pre-Viking interest in secular portraits in northern English sculpture, as exemplified by the Repton warrior, possibly Æthelbald, and the secular aristocratic portrait on the Bewcastle cross. While these secular images are exceptional in the context of pre-Viking monastic and ecclesiastical sculpture in England, they may be early indicators of a shift of patronage and interest in secular themes already before the arrival of the Vikings. Likewise, images of warriors and horsemen from the Viking period are most likely to represent secular portraits of patrons or of individuals commemorated by the monuments. It is interesting to note that some of the warrior images not only appear on crosses but are accompanied by ecclesiastical figures. This may lend Christian connotations to some, but by no means all, of these martial images. Some of the horsemen may even have derived from or were influenced by Christian models (Hadley 2008: 275–76). Nonetheless, the real reason for their inclusion on these public monuments seems to have been the message they conveyed about the social status, moral stature, and cultural affiliation of the patrons who commissioned them (cf. Hadley 2008: 277).

Viking-Age warrior portraits show considerable diversity in design and execution.¹⁰ The regional distribution of particular types may indicate local fashions and even the influence of individual carvers and workshops (e.g. the characteristic Ryedale portraits as a distinct group of local fashion; Lang 1991: 41–42). Most carvings display static portraits of individuals, but a few men are engaged in action: marching in processions, possibly hunting, fighting, or even jousting (see Neston, Cheshire). Some are depicted frontally, others in profile, on horseback, standing, or in seated positions. A small number of them have female companions (e.g. in Weston, Western Yorkshire, and in Neston, Cheshire). Many of them are accompanied by one or more pieces of standard warrior gear (shield, spear, sword, axe, or helmet). Some of the warriors are depicted with one

¹⁰ For a brief overview of warrior portraits, see Bailey 1996a: 84–85 and Hadley 2008: 275–78.



Figure 41. Part of cross shaft, Billingham (no. 1A), Co. Durham. First half of tenth century. After Stuart 1867. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

or two birds, which prompts a possible association with Odin through his two ravens and his association with eagles, but no particular mythological narrative can be related to any of these figures. In addition, birds of prey may also refer to the aristocratic pastimes of hunting and falconry, and function as simple attributes of high social status, as on the pre-Viking Bewcastle cross. (Human figures with birds but without weapons may also have a variety of Christian connotations due to the rich symbolism of birds, especially the dove and the eagle, in Christian iconography.) A number of carvings show warrior-horsemen with spears, a further characteristic of the iconography of Odin, but without further distinguishing attributes (e.g. at Gainford, Sockburn, Hart, and Chester-le-Street in Co. Durham). While warriors with birds will be briefly discussed below, these more general depictions of rider-warriors will not be examined in further detail.¹¹ Among

¹¹ Similar images of horsemen also appear on numerous Gotland picture stones dated to the eighth and ninth centuries. In a detailed study of the Lärbro group Lori Elaine Eshleman ascribed special symbolic significance to these rider-warriors in the context of a shared cultural community that included Germanic societies both on the Continent and in Scandinavia. She attested parallels to the rider motif in late Merovingian and Carolingian art and also pointed to characteristics shared with (pre-Viking) insular art (Eshleman 1983: 23–30, 216–99). Andreas Lundin (2006) linked the Gotland rider-warriors to the classical *adventus* motif, providing further evidence for the cross-cultural significance of the horseman motif. Migration-Period representations of horses and horsemen (on bracteates, figure brooches, and the figural foils of the Uppåkra beaker) are often associated specifically with Odin through his horse Sleipnir that carries him between the worlds and brings dead warriors to Valhalla. In pre-Christian Scandinavian thought horses in general seem to have been connected to death, which may explain their frequent appearance on commemorative monuments (Davidson 1993: 33, 74; Hårdh 2006: 257).

the carvings testifying to the popularity of heroic iconography, Baldersby 1 and Kirklevington 4 deserve special attention for possibly displaying images of berserkers, the fierce and fearless warriors associated with Odin and shape-shifting. The ecstatic fury of the berserkers, known in Old Norse as *berserksgangr*, indicates a further facet of the composite character of Odin: his association with magic and shamanism. Images of valkyries, also associated with Odin and the heroic tradition, will be discussed below in the context of female figures.

The third group among the sculptural pieces possibly associated with Odin only contains one carving, and quite an unusual one: Kirkbymoorside 3. It possibly alludes to Odin's self-sacrifice on Yggdrasil, but at the same time recalls the crossless type of Crucifixion iconography. While the previous carvings suggest the survival of the pre-Christian iconographical tradition of heroic warriors in a secular context, this latter image may indicate a dialogue between the old and the new religions. After a brief survey of the carvings related to or associated with the figure of Odin, the reassessment of his figure in an Anglo-Scandinavian cultural context will be discussed in greater detail.

Images of Warriors and Other Figures with Odinic Attributes

The first group of Viking-Age carvings possibly associated with the iconography of Odin depict human figures accompanied by birds. The warrior portrait on face A of the cross of Leeds 1 (1ghjk A iv; Figure 5) has already been discussed above in the context of the iconography of Wayland, whose image (on face C) it faces on the monument. The carving depicts a left-facing warrior with a cloak, helmet, and a sword, and he has a bird of prey perching on his shoulder. Below his sword is a triangular symbol that resembles the Odinic *valknut*. The carving is likely to represent the patron and/or a high-status warrior commemorated by the monument, displaying usual heroic attributes, rather than the god Odin himself.

The other carvings of this group are problematic for several reasons. First, the figures lack any weapons; thus they are unlikely to be warriors. Second, while ravens and eagles are common Odinic attributes, birds play an important role in Christian iconography as well and are attributes of several saints. Furthermore, as a reference to hunting and falconry, birds also appear in secular images as an indicator of high social status, as noted above. Last but not least, three of the carvings to be discussed are fragmentary, which makes it impossible to reconstruct the iconographical context of the figures with birds.

Among the monuments in question, the only carving that presents an additional feature of potential significance is Billingham 1 from Co. Durham.



Figure 42. Fragment of upper part
of cross shaft, Kirklevington (no. 2A),
Northern Yorkshire.

First half of tenth century.

Photo: Tom Middlemas.

Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon
Stone Sculpture, Durham University.



Figure 43. Part of cross shaft, Sherburn
(no. 1A), Eastern Yorkshire.

Tenth to eleventh century.

Photo: Tom Middlemas.

Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon
Stone Sculpture,
Durham University.

Sadly, the carving on this early tenth-century cross-shaft fragment, now built into the church tower, is almost unintelligible; it can only be reconstructed with the help of a drawing from 1867 (Stuart 1867) (Figure 41). It depicts a standing human figure pierced through his waist by a bar terminating in interlace. His arms are extended, and he is holding two birds on his wrists. The interpretation of the carving is uncertain, but an association with Odin might be suggested on the basis of the two birds and the piercing bar that might represent a spear.

A contemporary shaft fragment from Kirklevington (no. 2, side A; Northern Yorkshire) shows a similar frontal figure of Anglo-Scandinavian style (Figure 42). He is wearing a pointed hat or helmet and a flared smock to knee level. Two birds with short legs are sitting on his shoulders. The iconography of the carving is again problematic; similarly to Billingham 1, an association with Odin might be proposed on the basis of the two birds. However, further attributes are missing. According to Bailey (1981: 93), the carving might represent Odin with his ravens or a warrior saint inspired by Divine Wisdom. Collingwood (1927: 163) interpreted the birds as doves and the man as the deceased.

A further figure with a bird on his shoulder appears on a tenth- or eleventh-century cross-shaft fragment from Sherburn (no. 1; Eastern Yorkshire), a site that also produced two Wayland carvings. It shows two crudely cut standing figures, with the feet of one on the head of the other (Figure 43). The upper one is wearing an ankle-length robe with a V-neck. His right arm is bent upward and is touching a bird on his right shoulder. Of the second figure only his head and upper body are visible. There is a row of rough pellets on his forehead, possibly indicating hair. The image is rather unusual, and the interpretation of the figure with the bird on his shoulder as Odin is problematic due to the lack of further evidence other than the bird. While the Anglo-Scandinavian context of all three monuments (Billingham, Kirklevington, Sherburn) makes a pre-Christian interpretation certainly possible, the carvings may equally represent secular or even ecclesiastical figures. An interesting Christian parallel for the use of two birds perching on shoulders is provided by an unusual carving on face C of the Nunburnholme cross (1bC). It shows a large frontal figure, now damaged, with two long-tailed birds on his shoulders. His large cup-like hands are resting on the heads of two smaller figures at his feet. Lang (1991: 193) interpreted the carving as a Crucifixion scene based on Irish parallels which depict Christ with two winged angels upon his shoulders and his hands extended towards Longinus and Stephaton. The carving shows close resemblance to the 'benediction scene' of York Minster 2A (Lang 1991: 54–55) and may have served as its model. In the latter the birds had been omitted.



Figure 44. Part of cross shaft and neck, Sockburn (no. 3A), Co. Durham. First half of tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

The second group of carvings associated with the iconography of Odin shows horsemen with a bird and/or spear. The weathered carving of a horseman from Shocklach (no. 1), Cheshire, that may possibly feature a spear and a bird and has been suggested to depict Odin on Sleipnir (Robinson 2003–04: 37–39) has already been discussed above. Among the other monuments of the horseman group the most interesting one is certainly the cross-shaft fragment from Sockburn (no. 3, side A; Co. Durham). It is contemporary with Billingham 1 and Kirklevington 2, and shows two images divided by panelling (Figure 44). In the upper part of the shaft, below the remains of an interlace pattern, there is a large knotted serpent. Below it a slightly stouped horseman is depicted in profile facing right, holding a large bird of prey on his extended arm. In the fragmentary lower scene, separated from above by a horizontal twist, two figures are facing each other. The one on the left is generally interpreted as a woman in a cloak, holding a drinking horn to the lips of

the other figure, probably a man, who is drinking from it. Much of the second figure is broken away. Between the two figures there is a round shield with a boss. The rather worn upper part of the facing side (C) shows two warriors in short tunics and with shields, either facing each other or marching in procession. The rider on face A is different from other Anglo-Scandinavian depictions of horsemen, but the presence of the serpent and the bird may suggest an association with Odin and the veneration of heroic warriors. The horseman could represent the individual commemorated by the monument. He is probably linked with the

image below, depicting the welcoming of a warrior (originally in Valhalla by a valkyrie), similarly to depictions on Gotland picture stones (Lang 1972: 240), as well as with the marching warriors (*einherjar*?) on the other side. This suggests a sequence of images consistent with the iconography of Odin and his warriors. In a recent article Rosemary Cramp (2010: 24) questioned the interpretation of the lower scene on face A as a welcoming of a warrior based on the orientation of the figures. While the figure on the right is depicted in profile, like all other figures on the shaft, the one on the left, wearing a long drapery, is half-turned towards the viewer, looking out of the picture. Cramp's analysis of Anglo-Saxon depictions of human figures (2008) has shown that secular figures are normally shown in profile while religious figures are usually depicted frontal facing. The semi-frontal orientation of the figure on the left, as well as its 'distinctive dress', suggested to Cramp that it could be the depiction of a cleric, and the scene may be a 'reconciliation' scene possibly recording land-taking (2010: 24).¹² As a commemorative monument, the cross may have been decorated with images of the life of a warrior: 'in warfare, reconciliation and land taking or even conversion, and his death ride' (Cramp 2010: 24). Whether the lower image represents reconciliation between a cleric and a warrior, or even the conversion of the latter, is doubtful although not impossible. The overall imagery of the monument is strikingly heroic and, together with several other monuments from the same site (Sockburn 21 and 15), strongly suggests familiarity with and acceptance of Scandinavian cultural and artistic traditions.

Similarly to the arrangement on Sockburn 3, two facing sides of a small cross-shaft fragment from Baldersby (no. 1, Northern Yorkshire) also display images that can be associated with the warrior cult. Side A shows a profile horseman with a spear (but without a bird) facing left (Figure 45). As I pointed out above, similar images are often found on Anglo-Scandinavian sculptures and are excluded from the present discussion due to the lack of further specific details. However, the image on side C, depicting two standing figures, is more unusual, thus the monument warrants special attention. The profile figure on the left is wearing a long robe with broad sleeves and a pointed hat or hood (Figure 46). He is facing right, and his face, although rather worn, is canine or bear-like (Lang 2001: 58). The figure

¹² Although there is no contemporary record of Scandinavian land-taking at Sockburn, besides sculptural evidence, it is possible, according to Cramp, that the lands of the pre-Viking proprietary monastery of Sockburn passed into Scandinavian ownership in the Viking period. The Scandinavian landlords acted as lay patrons to a mother church, until in the late tenth or early eleventh century the lands were possibly passed on to the Community of St Cuthbert by Snaculf. See Cramp 2010: 10–11.



Figure 45. Cross-shaft fragment from Baldersby (no. 1A), Northern Yorkshire.



Figure 46. Cross-shaft fragment from Baldersby (no. 1C), Northern Yorkshire.

Godalming, Surrey, Charterhouse, The Museum. First half of tenth century.

Photos: P. M. J. Crook. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

on the right, facing left, has a knee-length kirtle and he is carrying a broad object (weapon?) over his shoulder, while touching the other figure with his right arm. His face is also canine or ursine, similar to the first figure. The hooded figure's cloak is similar to that on Kirklevington 2 (product of the same workshop; Lang 2001: 58), while the animal faces are paralleled on Kirklevington 4. According to Lang (2001: 58), the hooded figure might represent a '*berseki* spirit', and so must the other one facing him, both referring to the fierce warriors of bear- or wolf-like characteristic dedicated to the god Odin. On the related carving of Kirklevington 4, a tenth-century shaft fragment, two other figures of animal heads appear on side A (Figure 47). They are facing each other and both touching a long object (weapon?) between them. The sculpture also displays an Anglo-Scandinavian ring-knot motif on side C. Since the other Kirklevington fragment (no. 2) might depict Odin or a warrior associated with him, an interpretation of these two figures as berserkers would not be completely out of context here. Lang, on the other hand, assigns the animal-headed figures of Kirklevington 4 an Irish origin and interprets them as 'the *incubi* associated with St. Anthony' (2001: 144).¹³

¹³ Lang (2001: 143) claims that the figure on the left has a goat head and the other a



Figure 47. Shaft fragment, Kirklevington (no. 4A), Northern Yorkshire. First half of tenth century. Photo: Derek Craig. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

There is a third carving of similar iconography from Lancaster (St Mary's Priory, no. 5; tenth or early eleventh century), yet with an interesting twist. This cross-shaft fragment displays (on side D) two tall anthropomorphic figures with beast heads and in long robes, flanking a decorative (empty) cross. They are looking slightly upward to the cross, they have large snouts, and their tongues are clearly visible (cf. Collingwood 1927: fig. 128 and Bailey 2010: ill. 586). Above the cross there are two (heavily damaged) descending birds, one above each lateral arm. The combination of the beast-headed figures with the cross is very unusual. The Halton cross (discussed above) does show a similar scene, but those attendant figures of the empty cross have clearly human heads. On the Lancaster cross shaft, the beast-

headed figures seem to be taking the place of the sponge-bearer and the lance-bearer, thus an association of the two figures with soldiers might be intended. If the two beast-headed figures are indeed descendants (in iconographical terms) of berserkers, the followers of Odin, the scene may reference the interpretation of the crucified Christ as a heroic warrior (cf. a similar idea represented on the Gosforth cross). It is more likely though that the iconography has Christian origins. If so, the beast-headed figures may, according to Bailey (2010: 224), represent devils, or even dog-headed Jews (following Cassiodorus's interpretation of the 'dogs' of Psalm 21). Alternatively, the scene may depict Christ acclaimed by two animals (cf. *Canticle of Habakkuk*), typologically referencing, according to Bede, both the Transfiguration (Christ made known between Moses and Elijah) and the Crucifixion of Christ (between the two thieves) (cf. Ó Carragáin 2005: 207 in

cockerel. This, however, is by no means obvious from the weathered carving.



Figure 48. Cross-shaft fragment from Kirkbymoorside (no. 3A), North Yorkshire. Hutton-le-Hole, Ryedale Folk Museum. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

the context of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses which show two bear-like beasts under the feet of Christ; for Lancaster 5, see Bailey 2010: 224–25).

Odin's Self-Sacrifice

The small cross-shaft fragment of Kirkbymoorside (no. 3; North Yorkshire) stands alone among the monuments associated with the iconography of Odin. On side A it shows a crudely cut standing human figure with his arms extended to the frames and his feet turned to the right (Figure 48). He is wearing a long gown and has a strange row

of pellets along his chin. Behind the head are obscure horizontal lines. Side C displays an S-shaped ribbon beast. Lang (1991: 156) argued for a secular portrait on side A, backed by a dragon. The pellets in this case might depict a curly beard. Bailey (1980: 134) on the other hand suggested an interpretation of the unusual pellets as a collar or noose, and the figure as the hanged Odin at his self-sacrifice on Yggdrasil, as it is reported in *Hávamál* 138–39. The bodily posture of the figure recalls the crossless type of Crucifixion iconography, as seen, for example, on the Gosforth cross, and the standing clothed Christ of the Irish tradition is paralleled, for example, on Brompton 14A (Northern Yorkshire). The visual echo of the Crucifixion with the unusual feature of the pellets around the figure's neck might suggest a link between Odin's sacrifice and Christ on the cross.

A similar figure with raised hands and pellets or a wavy line around his neck is found on the rune stone of Sparlösa (Vg 119) in Västergötland, Sweden. Above his head is a row of decorative crosses. No satisfactory interpretation has so far been offered for the figure, but the runic inscription on the opposite face contains a possible Odin-heiti (metaphor) for 'warlord or king' (Norr 1998: 189–219, esp. 207). Bo Isakson (2004: 77, with further references) noted similarities between the Sparlösa stone and northern English stone monuments regarding their carving technique and shape, and pointed at further insular manuscript

influence on the design of the inscription and a parallel of punctuation on the Franks Casket.

Old and New Traditions

Even though the interpretation of the insular carvings is often uncertain, Viking-Age sculptural evidence seems to suggest a number of different functions associated with the figure of Odin in the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement areas. The knowledge of some of these functions is also confirmed by the evidence of skaldic poetry composed in England. The most widespread Odinic function is his association with heroic warriors, represented by the images of horsemen and warriors with spears and birds, and possibly of his berserkers. Representations of the Ragnarök events and possibly Odin's self-sacrifice on Yggdrasil indicate the circulation of at least two key mythological narratives related to the god. (A third myth, the theft of the mead of poetry, is referred to in kennings in skaldic poetry.) The iconographical context of the carvings suggests that in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities some connections were established between Odin's figure, his warriors, and the Christian lore. According to the testimony of the Gosforth cross, Christ was accepted among the heroic warriors and welcomed in afterlife by a cup-bearing woman in the fashion of a heroic nobleman.¹⁴ Points of resemblance were also seen between the figures of Christ and Odin himself on various levels. The most obvious link is their role as supreme gods; Odin's designation as 'Allfather' might actually reflect Christian influence on the Norse tradition.

The other major parallel between the roles of Odin and Christ was seen in their self-sacrifices on the world tree Yggdrasil and the cross respectively, as it has often been pointed out in scholarly literature. Odin's self-sacrifice is recorded in *Hávamál* 138–39, where he is described acquiring the knowledge of the runes by offering himself to himself by hanging on Yggdrasil, wounded with a spear, without food and drink for nine long nights. Hanging and dedication by spear were therefore rites associated with Odin. References to the practice of hanging

¹⁴ A similar idea of a festive reception in the afterlife might be suggested at the end of *The Dream of the Rood* where the heavenly banquet is depicted. In the context of the heroic imagery of the rest of the poem, it may recall the feast of the warriors in Valhalla, although the image of the heavenly banquet also has biblical sources in Luke 14. 15 and Revelation 19. 9. The image of the feast is, however, dependent on our accepting the reading of the manuscript word *symle* 'forever; continually' (line 141) as dative singular of *sym(b)el* 'feast, banquet', as it is usually suggested in the editions (noted by Gale Owen-Crocker, pers. comm.).

are found in Old English literature in *The Fortunes of Men* (10–14, 33–42) and in *Beowulf* (2444–62); however, there is no reliable evidence for human sacrifices to Odin from the Anglo-Saxon period (Owen 1981: 15–20).¹⁵

The Norse image of the god sacrificing himself by hanging on a tree may have been influenced by the central narrative of Christianity, in particular in the surviving literary sources recorded in the post-conversion period. Although the significance of the story and some of its details might have changed due to contacts with Christianity, the story of the self-sacrificing god was deeply rooted in pre-Christian thought, and its origin lies in shamanistic rituals and in initiation rites performed in order to acquire new and sacred knowledge (Davidson 1964: 144; Simek 1993: 249). The similarities between the Christian and the pagan stories are striking, however. Both gods are sacrificed on the Tree of Life or the world tree, both are pierced by spear,¹⁶ and both sacrifices are self-sacrifices, with Odin giving ‘himself to himself’, and Christ the Son sacrificed by and for the Father with whom he is one in the Holy Trinity. However, Christ’s death on the cross is not only a self-sacrifice, but also a forceful death as a result of treason. Christ’s association with other Norse mythological characters shows that both aspects found analogies: the parallel with Odin on Yggdrasil emphasizes the self-sacrificial nature of the Crucifixion, while seeing Christ as a warrior dedicated by spear and hanging and the association with Balder’s death indicate his role as a victim. Odin’s and Christ’s ritual deaths show one more important parallel: neither of the two gods suffers real death, but they travel between the worlds of the living and the dead, gaining access to a realm impenetrable for the rest of

¹⁵ The description of the Crucifixion in the Old Saxon poem *Heliand* brings together the sacrificial deaths of Christ on the cross and Odin’s hanging on Yggdrasil by referring to the cross as ‘gallows’ and ‘criminal-tree’ (Song 66; Murphy 1992: 182–85) and describing Christ’s death as ‘the Protector of the Land died on the rope’ (Song 67; trans. by G. Ronald Murphy in Murphy 1992: 187). The reference here to Odin’s hanging on the world tree was undoubtedly recognized by the contemporary audience, and the Germanic heroic tradition and imagery left a distinguishable mark on the entire poem. These Germanic elements are explored in detail in Murphy (1989: 75–94).

¹⁶ The piercing of Christ’s body on the cross is an important marker of his sacrificial role (‘They will look to the one whom they have pierced’, John 19. 37), and a fulfilment of the prophecy in Zechariah 12. 10 (echoed in Revelation 1. 7). The relic of the Holy Lance (the lance of Longinus) was highly venerated among early medieval Germanic rulers, and both Æthelstan and Charlemagne claimed to have possessed a relic of the lance (Loomis 1950; for a possible connection with the cult of Odin, see Hill 1982–83). The insular interest in Longinus, the converted warrior, is further attested in the popularity of the Crucifixion iconography with the two soldiers in Anglo-Saxon art, in particular before the tenth century.

mankind.¹⁷ Odin's hanging on Yggdrasil pierced by a spear is a ritual death, an initiation, and a voluntary sacrifice for the acquisition of the secret knowledge of the runes, which qualifies him as a culture hero. Although Odin does not share the suffering of the world or directly save mankind by his sacrifice, both gods bring something invaluable to mankind. They themselves become the link between the different worlds.

The association of Odin's self-sacrifice with Christ's Crucifixion is largely dependent on the symbolic location of the two acts: the world tree. It is this parallel that we turn to next.

The Cosmic Tree

In Norse cosmology the different parts of the cosmos are structured around and connected by a central pole, the ash Yggdrasil, which in its function as the world tree shows similarities with the Christian cross. Trees had played an important role in the culture of the Germanic peoples from early on,¹⁸ and the concept of the cosmic tree or Tree of Life is a key element of several mythologies and cosmologies. Therefore, it is not surprising that Christ's sacrificial cross has also been associated with the Tree of Life, and that a parallel between that and Yggdrasil, the cosmic tree of Norse mythology, has long been noted.¹⁹

The eddic sources (*Völuspá* 19–20, 27, 47 and *Grímnismál* 30–35, 44) identify the mythical Yggdrasil as an ash tree. It receives the properties of a world tree in Snorri's detailed depiction in *Gylfaginning* 15, according to which it is the biggest and best tree of all trees upon which the welfare of the universe depends.

¹⁷ Besides this shamanistic act of death and rebirth, Odin is also known as a psychopomp (guide of souls to the otherworld) from the *Völsunga saga* and *Egils saga Asmundar* (Davidson 1964: 143). Although it is the valkyries who are generally known to guide the dead warriors to the otherworld, they also do it on his command.

¹⁸ Various reports about Charlemagne's campaign to the Saxons in 772 refer to the cult of the sacred tree Irminsul among the continental Germanic peoples. It was a huge tree trunk erected in open air, probably a cultic pole of the type of world pillars, which was used as a place of worship. A less probable interpretation is suggested in Widukind of Corvey's *Res gestae Saxonicae*, according to which it was a sign of victory (Simek 1993: 175–76). There is evidence for a similar ancient cultic pillar erected at Yeavering, to which more recent ones were added later. In heroic literature trees are also frequently associated with noble warriors and weapons and are often mentioned in kennings both in eddic and in Old English poetry.

¹⁹ Yggdrasil has generated much scholarship over the years. Two recent detailed studies, which also provide summaries of earlier scholarship, are Motz 1991 and Andrén 2004.

It rises up to the sky, and its branches are spread over the whole world. It forms the centre of the world, and it supports the universe as a main pillar (*axis mundi*). It also serves as a vertical road, bridging and connecting different worlds. The name of the tree, 'Ygg's (Odin's) horse', refers to Odin's self-sacrifice by hanging himself on Yggdrasil.²⁰

Yggdrasil has three roots: one reaches to Hel, the world of the dead, another to the world of the frost-giants (Jötunheimr), and the third to the world of men (Miðgarðr). According to Snorri, there are three wells at its base, one under each root: Mímisbrunnr, 'the well of Mímir', Hvergelmir, 'roaring kettle'(?), and Urðarbrunnr, 'Urd's well; the well of fate'. *Völuspá* (19) only mentions Urd's well, which might reflect an earlier tradition. The cosmic tree is inhabited by various animals: the squirrel Ratatosk runs up and down the trunk, an eagle sits in its branches, four stags are eating its leaves, and Níðhöggr the serpent-dragon, together with several snakes, is gnawing at its roots. Although constantly nourished by the waters of the wells, Yggdrasil is not eternal; it is rotting gradually, which is a sign of general decay. Before Ragnarök the gods will sit in council beneath it, and Yggdrasil will quiver as a sign of the coming of the end of the world, and then probably fall, but will be restored in the new world (*Völuspá* 47) (Turville-Petre 1964: 279; Motz 1991; Simek 1993: 375–76).

Although Yggdrasil is often mentioned in literary sources, only very few visual representations are known from Scandinavia. A sixth-century memorial stone from Sanda, Gotland, shows a tree with a dragon underneath (possibly a later addition), together with other cosmic symbols (a whirling disc representing the cosmos or sky with constellations and two little circles for the sun and the moon or day and night) and a ship (Davidson 1975: 175–76 and pl. 26). Later medieval images all represent Yggdrasil as an inhabited tree, in accordance with Snorri's description. The reliefs on the interior wall of the stave church at Sogne, Norway, depict the tree with the stags and Níðhöggr (Simek 1993: 376), while later Icelandic manuscript illuminations also show the other animals.

The concept of the cosmic tree was almost certainly known in Viking-Age England, even if possibly in a different form than we know it from the later Scandinavian sources. In skaldic poetry of insular context, Yggdrasil is mentioned once in Hallvarðr háreksblei's *Knútsdrápa* (Jesch 2001: 319), and there is one stone monument from the Viking period that may possibly be related to the iconography of the Norse cosmic tree: the tenth-century circle-headed cross of Dearham (no. 1; Cumbria). The broad face of the shaft (side A) is decorated with

²⁰ In Anglo-Saxon culture gallows were understood as the horses of the hanged; cf. the phrase 'ride on galgan' ('rode on the gallows') in *Beowulf* 2445–46, meaning 'being hanged'.



Figure 49. Cross shaft and head, Dearham (no. 1A), Cumbria. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

multiple ring-chain motifs of Borre-style origin that merge into a bulb-like object at the base of the shaft (Figure 49). The plant-like bulb has two thick branches terminating in leaves(?) (possibly a third offshoot in the middle), and there seem to be two birds flanking the bulb/tree. The other sides of the shaft are all decorated with plait or interlace. The unusual bulb-like object was interpreted in the nineteenth century by W. S. Calverley as *Yggdrasil* (1899: 124), which was motivated by the setting of the stone at that time with the bulb half-buried in the ground (Calverley 1899: drawing facing p. 124; Bailey and Cramp 1988: 94). The representation is unusual in the sense that the threefold root of the cosmic tree, often emphasized in the literary sources, is missing. That might reflect an earlier version of the concept of the world tree or a different regional tradition. An interesting parallel to the Dearham cross may be found on the rune stone of *Ledberg* (Östergötland, Sweden), which depicts *Fenrir* swallowing *Odin* (see above). The narrow side of the monument shows a single large cross, the base of which splits into two roots. They are encircled by a knotted band whose two ends form another two roots. The four large roots give the clear impression of the cross being a living tree. This iconography invites an interpretation of the cross as a cosmic tree or the *Tree of Life*. Since this interpretation was well known among Christians, it may have easily evoked associations and parallels of pagan cosmological origin.

The Christian representation and symbolism of trees had been strongly influenced by the ancient oriental concept of the cosmic tree. Trees in Christian art and literature are symbols of divine or human life, both temporal and eternal, but they can also symbolize transience and death. In the Old Testament trees are often places of divine presence or appearance, or they symbolize powerful rulers or the righteous. The biblical Tree of Life has acquired especially rich symbolism, and various legends became attached to it throughout the centuries. Scriptural sources (Genesis 2. 9 and 3. 22–24; Revelations 2. 7 and 22. 2, 14, 19) explain the Tree of Life as the symbol of Paradise and the symbol of wisdom (Proverbs 3. 18). Representations of the cross of Christ as the Tree of Life are known from as early as the fifth century and onwards, and they were based on various legends and speculations that enjoyed great popularity throughout the Middle Ages. According to typological interpretation, first formulated by Justin, the Tree of Life in Paradise, situated in the middle of the earth, represents a type of Christ's cross, which is the true Tree of Life. The cross was also interpreted as related to the Tree of Life in a more physical way, as an offspring of the Tree of Life that grew from a seed of the paradisiacal tree (Kirschbaum 1968–72: I, 259–67; II, 260). According to another medieval legend, the cross was made directly of the wood of the Tree of Life (or the Tree of Knowledge) of Paradise, which again suggests a direct physical connection between the two. The association of vine and vine scrolls with the Tree of Life was based on the widespread belief that both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge were actually vines bearing the fruit of eternal life. In the early medieval understanding of the cross as fruit-bearing tree or vine, Christ was interpreted as its fruit and his blood shed at the Crucifixion as the wine made of this fruit. The Eucharistic significance of the scene needs no further explanation.

Early insular crosses of Anglian origin or influence were often decorated with vine scrolls that were derived from the Constantinian vine of Mediterranean art, referring to the Gospel texts 'I am the true vine' (John 15. 1) and 'I am the vine and you are the branches' (John 15. 5). Thus the vine-scroll patterns on Anglian crosses, often populated with animals or even human figures, were not purely decorative designs, but symbolized Christ and the true believers. At the same time they also added an ornament of life to the crosses, recalling the rich symbolism of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. In insular manuscript illuminations Christ's cross was sometimes depicted as a tree trunk with branches or even with leaves, emphasizing its interpretation as a living tree. The reference here emphasizes the link between the paradisiacal Tree of Knowledge and the Fall of Man and Christ's redemption of mankind on the cross as the Tree of Life. Similarly, on a tenth-century cross shaft at Kirkby Wharfe (1A) in

Western Yorkshire, two standing figures (Mary and John) are flanking an empty cross which has trefoil leaves growing from its arms, referencing 'Redemption necessitated by the Fall' (Coatsworth 2008: 186; cf. also Bailey 1980: 147). The Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, as well as its earlier and shorter version in runic script on the Ruthwell cross, indicate not only the widespread cult and veneration of the cross among the Anglo-Saxons, but also a view of the cross as a living being (with its own voice in both texts).

The widespread association of Christ's cross with the Tree of Life invited obvious parallels with the Norse counterpart, Yggdrasil, or its insular equivalent. On the one hand, both constituted the centre of the universe: Yggdrasil in a more physical way, while the cross primarily (but not exclusively, according to medieval legend) in an abstract sense through its central function in the Christian doctrine. A further parallel between Yggdrasil and the cross was provided by their roles in the self-sacrifices of Odin and Christ respectively, as well as by being sacred poles along which the movement between the worlds of the living and the dead was possible.

It is easy to get carried away by the beauty of these parallels, but in reality it is hard to determine whether a connection between Yggdrasil and the cross was ever intended on the Dearham carving. It seems certain that the Anglo-Saxons considered Christ's cross more than an instrument of death, something that carries the signs of life and is closer to a living tree than to a man-made object. In the Anglo-Scandinavian communities aspects of the two trees, Yggdrasil and the cross, might have been mingled alongside the parallels noted above, and the concept of the living cross as the world tree may have been strengthened.

Female Figures

Compared to the variety of images of men, from mythological and heroic figures to secular portraits of warriors and horsemen, the presence of female figures is rather limited in the sculptural corpus discussed. The only identifiable female deity is Sigyn, wife of Loki, who appears on the Gosforth cross (1A; Figure 34) tending to her bound husband. The carving corresponds to the image of the crucified Christ on the facing side A, which also contains a female figure in similar style (braided hair, long dress). Both images display women in their traditional social roles as tending to men, and both are depicted as cup-bearers, although their actions are exact opposites. The female figure of the Crucifixion image (discussed in detail in Chapter 2) is offering a drink as a 'heroic welcome' to the world of death, and her presence signifies the moment of death of the Son

of Man. Sigyn, on the other hand, is preventing Loki from dying by catching up the poisonous liquid, the snake's venom, in her bowl. The potential parallel between the bound Loki, the bringer of death and destruction, and the heroic Christ who defeats death is further emphasized through the presence and shared but reversed roles of the female figures.

Another female figure, the heroic-legendary princess Beadohild, features prominently in the iconography of the Yorkshire Wayland carvings. Although Wayland's revenge through rape and impregnation excluded her from the traditional female social function as wife, Beadohild's role as the mother of the future hero Wudga/Widia seem to have elevated her status in Anglo-Saxon England, as we have seen in Chapter 1. The eddic source of the myth also suggests an association of Wayland's wife Alvítr and the other two swan maidens with valkyries — a connection that will be briefly explored below.

Occasionally female figures also appear in secular images as companions of men (see Weston, Western Yorkshire, and Neston, Cheshire). In a few cases the iconographical context allows for an interpretation of these figures as valkyries, or at least suggests a strong influence of the iconography of valkyries on the representation of the female figures. The association of valkyries with Odin and the heroic tradition warrants a place for these carvings here. Admittedly, some (or all) of these carvings probably fall into the category of secular commemorative stones, but the possible pagan origin of the iconography of the Scandinavian-style female figures makes it worth examining them in the present context.

The Valkyries

In the early Germanic tradition, valkyries (Old Norse pl. *valkyrjur*, 'choosers of the slain') were fierce female demons of death and battle. The change in the concept of Valhalla from a battlefield covered with corpses of the slain to a warrior's hall also marked a shift in the conception of the valkyries (Simek 1993: 347, 349; Simek 1995: 470). The earlier conception of fierce female spirits or demons attending the war god seems to have been replaced by a different picture that came to Scandinavia possibly from the East (Davidson 1967: 130). Valkyries became supernatural female warriors, often of human origins, who, following the wish of Odin, interfered in the course of battle, determined the fate of warriors, and acted as psychopomps escorting the chosen heroes to Valhalla. There they welcomed them with mead and as the hosts of the hall served all *einherjar* with food and drink (cf. *Gylfaginning* 36; *Grímnismál* 36). With this shift valkyries lost much of their original demonic character, acquired human traits, and became popular characters of heroic literature and skaldic poetry.

The original twofold nature of the valkyries is reflected in their association with burial mounds and the different literary and folklore traditions concerning their forms of existence. They did not always appear as beautiful women clad in armour; the original dark aspect of their nature found its expression in an oversized stature (cf. the tradition of demonic female guardian figures reflected in Grendel's mother) or in a half-human, half-animal form (possibly depicted on the Franks Casket) (Davidson 1969: 220). Valkyries were also frequently associated with birds, especially with swans and ravens. They seem to be related to swan maidens that are known from a variety of cultural traditions (cf. reference in *Völundarkviða*), and their association with death might have resulted in the Scandinavian folk belief that the sight of a swan in flight was an omen of death (Hastings and others 1908–27, cited in McGuire and Clark 1987: 40). Birds were generally associated with divination and were looked upon as the bringers of news (e.g. Odin's two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, or the birds that inform Sigurd about Regin's plan). In the Old English poem *Exodus* (line 164) a raven over the Egyptian army is referred to as *wonn wælceaseg* ('the dark one choosing the slain'), an expression which is cognate with Old Norse *valkyrja*. Similarly to valkyries, the raven also appears in close association with Odin.

In their duties the valkyries overlap with other mythological female beings, such as the norns who determined fate, the *völvas*, sorceresses or seers, who had the power to acquire knowledge of secrets and of the future by intercourse with the dead, and the *fylgjur* who were attendants of individuals as their 'exterior souls' or guardian spirits, and usually took the shape of female figures (McGuire and Clark 1987: 40; Simek 1993: 96–97; Mundal 1993a; Mundal 1993b; Naumann 1993). Several of the eddic sources suggest that *disir* were also valkyrie-like guardians of death (cf. *Atlamál* 28), and in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 19 valkyries are even called 'Odin's *disir*'.²¹

The motif of a valkyrie welcoming a dead warrior in Valhalla is a common image on Viking-Age picture stones from Gotland: Halla Broa IV (Lindqvist 1941–42: I, pl. 48, fig. 116), Nar Bosarve (Lindqvist 1941–42: I, pl. 70, fig. 175), and Stenkyrka Lillbjärs III (Lindqvist 1941–42: I, pl. 44, fig. 112) all show female figures proffering a horn of drink in welcome to a warrior on horseback. Alskog Tjängvide I (Lindqvist 1941–42: I, pl. 57, fig. 137) shows more details: here the woman's long hair is braided and tied back in a knot, and her trailing dress is partly covered by a shawl or short cloak. She is greeting Odin himself on

²¹ The actual role of the *disir* can only be defined with difficulty: the word seems to refer both to the souls of dead women and to women in general, but it can also denote a kind of goddess (maybe a fertility deity) (Simek 1993: 61; Lindow 2002: 95).

his eight-legged horse. Another two picture stones from Lärbro St Hammars also show a horn-bearing woman greeting a horseman. Similar female figures are also known from gold foils and from small silver or bronze figurines and amulets from Viking-Age Scandinavia.²²

According to the testimony of textual sources, valkyries were well known in Anglo-Saxon England long before the arrival of the Vikings. The Old English word *walcyrge* (or *walcyrrie*), cognate with Old Norse *valkyrja*, is attested from the eighth century onwards in word lists. In Glossary I in London, British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra A. III and in the older *Corpus Glossary* it glosses the names of classical furies (North 1997: 105–06). Poetic sources allude to a valkyrie tradition native to Anglo-Saxon England: the Old English *Charm for a Sudden Stiche* (against ‘elfshot’) describes supernatural female spirits riding over a barrow, yelling and sending spears, while in the *Charm for a Sudden Swarm*, flying bees are described as *sigewif*, ‘victory-women’.²³ But valkyries were not always understood as mythological or supernatural figures. In Wulfstan’s *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (c. 1014) the word refers to human sorceresses or seers (probably related to the concept of the *völva*) who are listed among those who are most stained with sin. In a Christian context they were probably only seen as ‘choosers of the slain’, as the etymology of the name itself suggests, which recalls their association with divination and death, as well as the reference in *Exodus* (line 164) to a raven as the ‘dark one choosing the slain’. The Old Norse literary corpus directly associated with the British Isles further supports the claim that valkyries were well known in Anglo-Scandinavian England: the tenth-century skaldic poem *Eiríksmál* describes Valhalla as inhabited with warriors (*einherjar*) and valkyries, and another six references to valkyries are found in skaldic poetry (see Jesch 2001: 319). Among material finds, a small Viking-Age metal mount or pendant of an armed female figure in a trailing dress, found near Donnington, Lincolnshire, has been suggested by Leahy and Paterson to depict a valkyrie (2001: 192, pl. 10.1). A further mount from Bylaugh, Norfolk, depicts a similar scene and it also includes a mounted warrior (*ibid*).

²² For illustrations see, for example, Roesdahl and Wilson 1992: cat. nos 175, 186, 281; Lindow 2002: 96, 276.

²³ The first charm (*For a Sudden Stiche*) is recorded on fols 175a–176a in London, British Library, MS Harley 585 (dated to the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries), while the second one (*For a Sudden Swarm*, or also called *For a Swarm of Bees*) is in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 41, p. 182 (dated to the early eleventh century). In spite of the relative late date of the manuscripts, both texts reflect an earlier pagan medical lore preserved over the centuries.

Among Viking-Age stone monuments from northern England, three carvings display characteristic representations of valkyries.²⁴ Two of them come from the same location, Sockburn in Co. Durham, and the third one is the Gosforth cross. The female figure in the Wayland-in-the-flying-contrivance iconographical pattern has also been suggested to depict a valkyrie. Even though the Beadohild interpretation seems more likely in an insular context, this suggestion will be discussed in some detail below.

The first carving from Sockburn on a fragmentary cross shaft (no. 3) has already been discussed among the monuments with warrior images (Figure 44). As noted above, the upper panel of face A contains a horseman with a bird on his arm, riding under a knotted serpent. It is the broken lower panel that is of special interest here. It depicts two figures with a bossed shield between them. The cloaked, semi-frontal figure on the left is proffering a drinking horn from which the figure on the right is drinking. Although Rosemary Cramp has questioned the female identity of the cloaked figure based on its semi-frontal position (2010: 24), the scene probably depicts the welcoming of a heroic warrior, originally by a valkyrie in Valhalla. James Lang (1972: 244–45) suggested that the two panels were probably meant to depict one scene, similar to images known from the Gotland picture stones (e.g. Klinte Hunninge), and it was the shape of the shaft that forced limitations on the sculptor who divided the scene and depicted the same warrior twice. Another two armed men on side C further contribute to the warrior iconography of the monument, of which the welcoming female figure was an integral part. If the cross was intended as a funerary or commemorative monument for a distinguished warrior of high social standing, the welcome of a valkyrie was certainly a fitting symbol of heroic, and social, recognition even though the hero may have expected to proceed to a Christian afterlife.

The second Sockburn carving (no. 15) is a fragment of a characteristically Anglo-Scandinavian monument, a hogback. On side A (long) there is a profile female figure with a long trailing gown, facing right (Figure 50). Her shoulders and head are broken away but she is clearly extending her arms. Judging by Scandinavian parallels, she may be proffering a drinking vessel. Behind the woman there is a proudly standing bird. The rest of the carving, and thus the potential recipient of the drink, is lost except for a decorative interlace below the image. The scene resembles the welcoming of warriors in Valhalla — possibly referring to

²⁴ There are several images of female figures on stone monuments from the Isle of Man too (e.g. Michael 123, Jurby 127 (99), Jurby 125 (98)). These are depicted in the Scandinavian manner, with long hair and trailing dresses; however, no certain identification of any of them as valkyries can be given due to the lack of context.



Figure 50. Hogback fragment, Sockburn (no. 15A),
Co. Durham. First half of tenth century.

Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

the desired fate of the deceased commemorated by the hogback, or a sign of social standing and recognition in Scandinavian terms. The iconography of the female figure of the Gosforth Crucifixion is in line with the same iconographical tradition, but the interpretation of the figure, a symbolic representation of death and mortality, suggests a more general understanding of the cup-bearing female figure.

Valkyries also appear in the eddic version of the myth of Wayland the smith — a story

that inspired numerous carvings in Viking-Age Yorkshire (the cross shafts of Leeds 1 and 2, the shaft fragment of Sherburn 3, possibly also of Sherburn 2, and the hogback fragment of Bedale 6; see Chapter 1). They all go back to the same iconographical pattern depicting Wayland bound in his flying contrivance. It is the identity of the female figure held by Wayland above his head that concerns us (again) in the present context. Due to the fragmentary nature of the carvings, the woman is only visible on the cross shaft in Leeds Parish Church (no. 1; Figure 4) and the cross-shaft fragment of Sherburn 3 (Figure 7). The latter shows a frontal human face surrounded by an arch that terminates in a bird's head on the top. The horizontal female figure is gripped by her waist by the beak of the upward looking bird-head, while the train of her dress and her pigtail with a knot are held by human hands reaching upwards. On the Leeds cross the female figure is similarly grasped by human hands by her hair and trailing dress, and a curving line above her waist is what is left from the gripping beak. The rest of the bird-head is broken away, although a semicircular line (which would enrich the now missing human head) is indicative of the bird's neck and shoulders. The two carvings thus depict the same scene. According to the surviving literary sources, there are two women in the Wayland story that could be identified with the female figure: Beadohild, the raped princess and future mother of Wayland's son, or Wayland's swan-maiden wife Alvitr. Together with W. G. Collingwood (1927: 163) and R. Bailey (1980: 106), I argued for an interpretation of the figure as Beadohild (see Chapter 1). On the other hand, Bishop G. F. Browne

(1885: 139) identified her (in the context of the Leeds carving) as the swan maiden *Alvítr* being carried off from the lakeshore. Due to the close connection between swan maidens and valkyries (through their ability to fly and their non-domestic nature) and the specific identification of the three swan maidens as valkyries in the introductory prose passage of *Völundarkviða*,²⁵ *Alvítr* has often been interpreted as a valkyrie who, according to Hauck's interpretation of the winged figure and his female companion (1977: 14–16), returned to help Wayland at his escape. Since the surviving insular sources suggest a more rationalized escape of Wayland with a flying contrivance and assign a prominent role to Beadohild in the story, highlighting her role also in this iconic visual representation seems more convincing than the swan-maiden or valkyrie theory.²⁶ The drinking horn held by the female figure on the Leeds cross (no. 1) further supports the connection with Beadohild (cf. Franks Casket), while it cannot be reconciled with the swan-maiden theory.

To sum up, valkyries were certainly not the only female figures of mythological or supernatural origin that were known in Anglo-Saxon England, but they were one of the most popular as well as most versatile female characters. According to the testimony of ecclesiastical sources, the southern areas seem to have developed a more general and secularized understanding of valkyries as sorceresses or seers by the late Anglo-Saxon period. It had been based on the earlier native tradition that imagined them as fierce battle spirits and guardians of the dead. In the Anglo-Scandinavian areas of the North, Viking-Age sculpture reflects Scandinavian influence both on the conception as well as on the visual representation of valkyries. They appear to have been part of the heroic aristocratic culture and feature on secular funerary monuments and memorial stones. In association with heroic culture, valkyries probably lost their original demonic features and became attendants of heroes and psychopomps. It is in these latter functions that a valkyrie-type figure, possibly evoking an association with *Hel* in her role as the cup-bearer (as suggested above), may appear in a symbolic function in the Gosforth Crucifixion scene. Taking it a step further, James Lang (1972: 247) suggested that the valkyrie may even serve as a Resurrection symbol receiving Christ in the afterlife.

²⁵ This identification may admittedly be a later addition to the story as a result of acculturation.

²⁶ The least convincing suggestion was made by McGuire and Clark identifying the woman as a valkyrie 'escorting the hero into heaven' (1987: 41).

The Lowther Hogbacks

There are two other monuments with female figures, other than valkyries, which can probably be associated with Germanic mythology and are paralleled in their iconography by carvings from Gotland. These are the large hogback from Lowther (no. 4), in Westmorland, Cumbria, and a smaller hogback fragment from the same site (no. 5), both dated to the tenth century. Side A of the former one (no. 4) shows a ship with eight warriors with shields (left) and a group of nine standing warriors with shields (right), separated by a female(?) demi-figure with her right arm bent across her body (Figure 51). On side C there are six demi-figures with long curled hair and arms bent across their bodies. Both scenes are positioned over the coiling bodies of serpents (Figure 52). John McKinnell (2001: 343, Appendix 1) interpreted the image on side A as Freyja taking half of the slain (cf. *Grímnismál* 14) and saw a possible parallel for the image in the procession of warriors on Gosforth 4A (the so-called 'Warrior's Tomb'; in Bailey and Cramp 1988: 105–06). That Freyja was indeed known in Anglo-Scandinavian England is suggested by a reference to her in Egill Skallagrímsson's *Höfuðlausn* in a kenning for gold (as 'tears of Freyja') (Jesch 2001: 320). For the carvings on side C (as well as on Lowther 5, see below) McKinnell suggested the interpretation of the daughters of Ægir and Rán (cf. *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, 29–30 and *Skáldskaparmál* 23, 31, 58). According to Dawn Hadley (2006: 215; 2008: 278), the hogback possibly depicts the legend of the valkyrie Hildr and the everlasting battle between Hedin and Högni. Similarly, based on a comparison to a wide scope of textual and visual sources,²⁷ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir has suggested in a forthcoming article that Lowther 4 could indeed represent Hildr and Gosforth 4 might also be related to the legend, although the imagery of the latter is not as conclusive as that of the Lowther stone. Bailey offers no explanation besides the assumption that the myth depicted must have been widely known (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 130–31; Bailey 1996a: 94). Parallels for side A from the picture stones of Stenkyrka Smiss I and Lärbro St Hammars I in Gotland do suggest a mythological or heroic origin for this scene, a story which may once have been widespread in the

²⁷ The relevant textual sources are the Old English *Widsith* and *Deor*, the Middle High German *Alexanderlied* and *Kudrun*, the Old Norse *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Haustlög*, *Héðins saga ok Högna*, Snorri's *Prose Edda*, and other Old Norse texts, and Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*. The visual sources include the Gotland picture stones Lärbro Hammars I and Stenkyrka Smiss I, the Oseberg wagon and tapestry, the Rolvsøy tapestry, and the Överhogdal tapestry. See Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir forthcoming.



Figure 51. Hogback, Lowther (no. 4A), Cumbria. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.



Figure 52. Hogback, Lowther (no. 4C), Cumbria. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

Viking world, but the exact meaning cannot be determined with certainty. Ships also appear on Lärbro Tängelgård I, Ardre VIII, etc., but the accompanying figure is often a horseman met by a female figure, indicating the reception of a hero in the afterlife, in accordance with the symbolic nature of the ship as a means of transportation between the worlds of the living and the dead. The coiling serpents under the figural scenes on both sides might refer to the world serpent or feature as symbols of transgression between worlds, but they could also be solely decorative motifs representing local fashion (Bailey and Cramp 1988: 130).



Figure 53. Hogback fragment, Lowther (no. 5A), Cumbria. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

Side A of Lowther 5 (Figure 53) shows four female demi-figures with arms folded in front of their bodies, almost identical with the ones on side C of Lowther 4 and interpreted by McKinnell (2001: 342) as the daughters of Ægir and Rán. The figure on the extreme right might be holding a ring. Below the figures there is a serpent. Side C (Figure 54) has almost the exact same pattern of four demi-figures and a serpent. The two Lowther hogbacks are likely to represent the same iconographical and narrative tradition, but its origins and significance need further investigation.

The Survival and Transference of Iconography of Scandinavian Mythological and Heroic Origins

The carvings discussed in this chapter demonstrate the continued interest in and survival of iconographical patterns and traditions of pagan Scandinavian origin in Anglo-Scandinavian England. When these images were carved in stone, they were transferred not only to a different medium, but also to a new cultural and socio-political context associated with this art form. The relative stability of popular iconographical patterns, in particular standard images of warriors, horsemen, and female figures, but also elements of the Sigurd and Wayland iconography, guaranteed their survival in terms of form and design, which constituted the artistic heritage and taste of the Scandinavian settlers, but at the same time the images were adapted to the new cultural context — not necessarily in form but in content. Gradually removed from their pagan context of origin, the images acquired secular and sometimes even Christian connotations. While female figures with drinking horns and trailing dresses had almost certainly recalled images of valkyries in the minds of observers familiar with Scandinavian



Figure 54. Hogback fragment, Lowther (no. 5C), Cumbria. Tenth century. Photo: Tom Middlemas. Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Durham University.

culture, their original association with Odin and the pagan afterlife, Valhalla, may have gradually faded. Their associations with the heroic and with death remained, however, and this more symbolic use ensured their continued survival in a secular commemorative context even after conversion. Similarly, heroic images of warriors and horsemen migrated into the realm of secular and Christian commemorative practices and remained in use on Christian monuments of stone. Manned warships and processions of warriors may have referred to contemporary events, preserving the established iconography but not necessarily the mythological links. The image of the world tree (if the interpretation of Dearham 1 is correct) shows the transference of an image into the realm of Christianity, connecting the two cultures in both visual and conceptual terms. The migration of images that accompanied the migration of their users indicates their move not only across geographical regions but also through cultural boundaries. The uncertainties of interpretations that surround these carvings (that is, are they pagan, secular, or Christian?) is the result not only of our lack of evidence and comparative material but also of the versatility of these images in terms of function and context — the exact same feature that enabled them to function as bridges between cultural traditions in a transitional period.

The Carvings as Historical and Cultural Documents

Having discussed the corpus of Viking-Age stone carvings with iconographical elements of mythological and heroic origins from an iconographer's point of view, it is time to proceed into the field of iconology and beyond, and examine these monuments as cultural-historical documents in their historical, social, and intellectual context. The special significance of these carvings lies in the fact that

they bear witness to the meeting of two cultures, the insular Christian culture of the Anglo-Saxons and the traditional Germanic (Norse) culture of the settling Scandinavians. They provide evidence of the intellectual and social processes that took place in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities, which ultimately resulted in the religious conversion and social integration of the new settlers.

There are a number of possible approaches that can be taken to examine the carvings as cultural-historical documents. These range from archaeological and art historical perspectives, focusing among others on the reasons for stylistic changes and the development of carving techniques, to the historian's interest in settlement patterns and in the patrons and functions of the monuments as manifestations of social status. In the following chapters I will approach the carvings as documents of an intellectual process that is usually labelled in the scholarly literature as the 'conversion of the Scandinavian settlers'. Conversion, as well as any other form of cultural change and assimilation, always takes places on two levels. On the one hand, it is a political and social phenomenon that can (with some luck) be attested in historical sources, and on the other, it is an intellectual change on the level of the individuals involved. In the next chapter I will define the terminology of conversion as an intellectual process in general and briefly discuss the specifics of the situation in northern England in the Viking period. Chapter 5 will address the characteristics of the religious accommodation process from the perspective of the individuals on the basis of the visual evidence provided by the monuments discussed above, and examine the way of thinking that enabled members of the Anglo-Scandinavian communities to cope with seemingly opposing world views and cultural-intellectual traditions.

Part II

Encounters

ENCOUNTERS OF RELIGIONS IN THE SCANDINAVIAN SETTLEMENT AREAS

Conversion and Christianization of the Scandinavian Settlers

One significant impact of the Vikings on England in the ninth century was ‘the impetus which the raids gave to the emergence of a sense of common identity among the English peoples’ (Keynes 1997: 62). This new sense of Englishness was defined, on the one hand, by growing political unity and, on the other, by the common Christian faith, both of which were felt to be endangered by the invaders. With the subsequent Viking settlement, the rise of ethnically mixed Anglo-Scandinavian communities in the Danelaw, and the integration of the Scandinavian settlers into the recipient society, the Scandinavian immigrants gradually adopted these two cornerstones of ‘English identity’. They achieved a relative political unity (first under the aegis of the Danelaw and later under English rule) and ultimately converted to Christianity. By the late eleventh century, especially under the threat of the Normans, the people of northern England came to see themselves as ‘English’.

The conversion of the Danelaw belongs to those topics of Anglo-Saxon scholarship that have produced such radically different understandings of the nature of the religion of the Scandinavian settlers, the piety of the native Anglo-Saxon communities, the process and result of the conversion, and the motivations thereof, that it seems almost impossible to make a statement whose opposite has not also been declared.¹ Therefore, the following section cannot and

¹ To demonstrate the diversity of opinions, Lesley Abrams (2001: 31 and 40) quotes a number of radically opposing views on various aspects of the conversion of the Danelaw.

will not attempt to give comprehensive answers to the great number of questions raised. Its aim is only to survey the evidence other than the stone carvings and to outline briefly the historical, political, and institutional aspects of the conversion, which will serve as a background for the investigation of Christianization as an intellectual process that found its expression in art.

The acceptance of Christianity as a new religion is a long process, marked by a series of public church rituals as well as by changes in the private, everyday lives of the converts. The public nature of baptism makes this stage of the process historically recordable, but tells us little about the nature of the religiosity of the converts. Following Lesley Abrams's suggestion, the terms 'conversion' and 'Christianization', which are often used interchangeably, should be distinguished to achieve clearer understanding. In this sense, 'conversion' should be used to denote 'the initial transition, marked by baptism (or some other formal acceptance of Christianity) and the first stages of participation in institutional forms'; 'Christianization', on the other hand, is used 'to mean the process whereby Christian beliefs and practices penetrated into the converted society' (Abrams 2001: 31). There are further technical terms (religious accommodation, inculturation, adaptation, syncretism, etc.) used by cultural anthropologists, theologians, and ecclesiastical historians to describe forms of religious encounter. These concentrate on the degree and nature of the cultural and spiritual influence and are thus linked to our use of the term Christianization. These terms will be discussed in detail below in connection with the sculptural evidence and applied to the present context. From a historical perspective, the distinction between conversion and Christianization should be sufficient here.

In the initial phase of settlement, the conversion of the Danes often involved a strong political component and was perceived as an agreement advantageous in the long run for both the converters and the converts. The entry for the year 878 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (879 in MS C) and Chapter 56 of Asser's *Life of King Alfred* document the most famous politically motivated baptism, that of the Viking leader Guthrum (later Æthelstan after his baptism) and thirty of his followers, with King Alfred acting as their godfather. The merit on Alfred's side is of course not so much spiritual (although no one would question the faith and zeal of such an outstanding monarch) but rather political, considering the godfather's power over his godsons, which was similar to a comitatus bond. The diplomatic significance of this step by the Danes is equally clear (it led to the acceptance of Danish political and legal control in the occupied territories, that is, the establishment of the Danelaw), but the deeper nature of the conversion remains uncertain.

In spite of numerous Viking attacks on monasteries, it is widely accepted that the Scandinavians had shown no particular hostility towards Christianity

as a religion during the invasions. Their destruction of Christian communities was politically and economically motivated, and so was their later conversion to the religion of the invaded. The difference in religion between the invaders and the invaded was, however, clearly emphasized by the authors of ninth- and tenth-century English documents who referred to the Scandinavians as 'pagans'. Asser in his *Life of King Alfred* calls them *pagani*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* uses the Old English term *hæpene*, and a number of tenth-century diplomas also refer to them as *pagani* (Abrams 2001: 32). Whether the term really indicated the observance of pagan practices, or rather served the ideological and political needs of the Anglo-Saxons remains unclear. The majority of the earliest Scandinavian settlers were certainly pagans (the later ones not necessarily), but very little is known about the religion they imported, and it also remains uncertain how long they maintained their native religion and, most importantly, in what form.

In Northumbria the beneficial cooperation of Anglo-Saxon clergymen with the Scandinavian rulers of York (e.g. Archbishops Wulfhere, Wulfstan I, and Wulfstan II, and the support of Guthfrith by the community of St Cuthbert²) shows a diplomatic situation similar to that in the southern areas of Scandinavian settlement. There is no evidence in the North of any organized evangelization of the new settlers (as opposed, for example, to Normandy and France, cf. Fletcher 1998: 388); nevertheless, surviving evidence suggests the successful conversion of the majority of the Scandinavians within a few generations after the settlement. How did they come into contact with Christianity? The most obvious way, besides exposure to Christian culture during travels and trade in Europe, is through the local Anglo-Saxon population via trade contacts and social relations. The nature and intensity of the religiosity of these local communities themselves are surrounded by uncertainty. We can suppose that those monastic churches which remained intact in the Scandinavian settlement areas or were transformed into proprietary churches under the control of secular landowners provided basic spiritual care and pastoral ministry (baptism, burial, etc.) for the neighbouring lay communities which gradually incorporated the new settlers. It is unlikely, however, that the Vikings first encountered Christianity in these mixed communities. The Scotto-Scandinavian and Hiberno-Norse immigrants of the North-West had already been exposed to Christianity in their previous settlement areas (Scotland and the Scottish Isles, and Ireland, respectively),

² The unique accession ceremony of Guthfrith, recorded in the *History of St Cuthbert* (*Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, c. 1031), presented a fusion not only of power, but also of cultural traditions: it took place on a hill and involved a golden armlet, according to Scandinavian fashion, as well as an oath sworn over St Cuthbert's body.

and they may have adopted several aspects thereof.³ Southern England and the Scottish Isles also continued to have an influence on the conversion of Scandinavian political leaders in the northern areas (Fletcher 1998: 380): King Æthelstan probably imposed baptism on Sihtric (II) in 926 (Abrams 2001: 39), and in 943 Olaf Cuaran (Sihtricson) of Dublin and York was baptized at the court of King Edmund of Wessex, and later he retired to Iona. According to the testimony of these late conversions of political leaders as well as that of sculptural evidence, the north-western areas of the Danelaw seem to have kept their pagan traditions longer than the eastern parts.

The encounters with Christianity and especially the motivations for conversion differed in the upper and lower layers of the society. For many Scandinavian leaders it was a tactical decision in order to establish themselves in a new and unstable environment, especially since the Church could offer models for kingship and the exercise of power (Hadley 1997: 94). It was also in the interest of the Church, considering the expansionist policies of Wessex towards Northumbria, which resulted in the seizure of ecclesiastical properties, the destruction of churches (see the burning of the church at Ripon by Eadred in 948), and the transfer of relics. Lastly, for the lowest social layers conversion was a natural means of social integration in their new communities.

It has often been suggested that the integration and assimilation of the Scandinavian settlers was a fairly rapid process. The speed of conversion and assimilation is hard to measure. It is not clear whether it is the earliest evidence of the meeting and mingling of cultures, or the latest evidence of surviving paganism, or the temporal difference between them that should be taken into account when judging the speed of this, obviously longer, process. That assimilation did take place is unquestionable, but whether a time frame of two to three generations is to be considered rapid needs careful evaluation.

Direct evidence for heathen practices is quite scanty, but iconographical elements of mythological and heroic origin on stone carvings suggest the survival of at least some of the pre-Christian narrative material and its iconography. However, that does not necessarily indicate the active practice of pagan religion. While the majority of early settlers were certainly pagans, later ones may well have been converted already before their arrival to England and had thus abandoned pagan practices. Nevertheless, they were certainly familiar with a number of

³ The mingling of the old and new traditions is well demonstrated by the grave of a Viking warrior found on the island of Colonsay in 1882. The man was buried with his horse and traditional grave goods beneath a boat, and at each end of the enclosure there was a small stone slab incised with a cross (Fletcher 1998: 373).

mythological, heroic, and semi-historical stories, images, and related cultural practices, and many may have upheld and even promoted social and ethical values rooted in pre-Christian culture.

One of the imported cultural practices was the tradition of skaldic poetry, the literary art of the Scandinavian courts. The Icelandic sagas provide evidence, with a certain amount of fictional detail, that Icelandic poets paid visits to various rulers in the British Isles,⁴ and the surviving corpus of skaldic verse bears witness to the practice of skaldic poetry at the courts of both English kings and the Scandinavian rulers of England. It is difficult to assert with certainty which texts were actually composed and performed in England (versus texts about England or with English influence that were produced in Scandinavia). Based on internal evidence of the skaldic texts, Judith Jesch (2001: 317–18) compiled a corpus of skaldic verse that was composed for performance in England (a total of six texts by five skalds), and a second list of poems addressed to kings or earls who ruled in England (but without evidence of the texts actually being performed in England; another eight texts by six poets).⁵ In spite of its roots in the culture of pre-Christian Scandinavia, skaldic poetry is a problematic source for attesting the distribution of mythological narratives (let alone religious practices) in Anglo-Scandinavian England because it allows a glimpse primarily of the courts (high-profile centres of power) and their cultural fashions rather than that of the Scandinavian settlers in general, and it contains a high degree of conventional images which may have little to do with active religious beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, the high number of references to Norse mythology and gods is striking, and it reinforces the existence of an identifiable pagan cultural tradition and the widespread knowledge of Norse mythology in Viking-Age England, as is also suggested by sculptural evidence. The mythological characters most

⁴ Egill Skalla-Grímsson visited both Erik Bloodaxe, the Viking ruler of York, and the English king Æthelstan, Gunnlaugr Illugason (Serpent-tongue) visited King Æthelred the Unready in London (before moving on to Dublin and the Orkneys), and Óttarr the Black performed to King Cnut (probably in Denmark rather than in England) (Jesch 2001: 313–17).

⁵ Due to the lack of conclusive internal evidence of an English context, Jesch excludes from the list *Eiríksmál*, a poem written in praise of Erik Bloodaxe after his death in England. Hofmann (1955: 42–51) and Kuhn (1969–78: II, 303) argued that the poem may have originated in York, while Lindow (1989: 26–29) suggested Denmark as its place of composition. McKinnell (2001: 328–29) also denied any Old English linguistic influence on the text. In spite of its uncertain connections with England in terms of the place of composition, pagan references in the poem have been noted in the previous chapters because it seems relevant that the poet found it fitting to include them to commemorate the ruler of English territories (and thus considered them generally comprehensible by Erik's followers).

frequently mentioned (either named or referenced in kennings) in skaldic verses from Viking-Age England are the gods Odin (mentioned a total of ten times in four different texts), Freyr (mentioned four times in three texts), and Ullr (mentioned three times) and the valkyries (mentioned six times in four texts). Sculptural evidence seems to reinforce the idea of a widespread iconographical tradition of valkyries and Odin's warriors but probably in an increasingly symbolic rather than mythological/religious sense. In addition to Odin, Freyr, Ullr, and the valkyries, the following deities are referenced on single occasions in the skaldic texts: Tyr, Bragi, Höd, Vili, and the goddesses Ilmr, Syn, and Vár. From those only Tyr is known to be recorded in sculpture. Among other mythological concepts discussed in connection with the carvings above, Hel, the Midgard serpent, and the world ash Yggdrasil also feature in skaldic poetry. Furthermore, various mythological and heroic stories lie beneath kennings describing gold as 'fire/sun of the wave/sea/river/Rhine' (five occurrences), 'Fróði's meal', 'tears of Freyja', 'bed of the serpent', and 'words of giants', as well as the kenning 'Odin's liquid' for poetry (Jesch 2001: 319–20). The heroic legend of Sigurd and the Völsungs, a popular subject in sculpture as we have seen above, is also referenced in the heroic encomium *Eiríksmál*, which, however, is excluded from Jesch's list of poems composed with certainty in England (see Chapter 4, note 5). In addition to the same cultural backdrop, Jesch also noted a stylistic similarity between poetry and sculpture in Egill's description of Erik Bloodaxe in *Arinbjarnarkviða* (stanzas 4–5) as a seated, helmeted warrior with fearsome eyes, associated with serpents, and the warrior portraits of Middleton in Northern Yorkshire (Jesch 2001: 312; Lang 1991: figs 676–81, 686–89). Public art and public poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian England may have been more closely connected and mutually influential than generally assumed, promoted and sponsored by similar social groups.

Although archaeology allows for occasional glimpses of Scandinavian paganism (cf. burial 511 at Repton), the evidence of burials for the religion of the settlers and for the Viking presence in England in general is meagre and problematic. In comparison with the rest of England, the northern areas show the highest number of Viking burials (see distribution maps in Wilson 1976: 394, Halsall 2000: 260, Richards 2000: fig. 63, and updated in Hadley 2008: 272, fig. 1), but the total number of finds is surprisingly low, due partly to the difficulty of identifying 'Viking' burials with certainty.⁶ The presence of grave goods has

⁶ For more information on Viking-Age burials in England, see, among others, Shetelig 1954, Wilson 1968 and 1976, Graham-Campbell 1980 and 2001, Halsall 2000, Richards 2002 and 2003, Redmond 2007, and Hadley 2008.

often been considered as a Scandinavian marker (due to its supposed association with paganism), but the evidence is not entirely conclusive. Although in England the deposition of grave goods strongly declined from the early eighth century, the practice was not completely abandoned among the English; therefore not all furnished burials are necessarily Viking (see Halsall 2000: 262–69). As Guy Halsall put it:

Furnished burial might be read, rather than simply as a passive reflection of Scandinavian origins, as an elaboration on a ritual theme played pianissimo for the previous 150–200 years; however, even on the most extreme, ‘Scandinavianist’ estimation this theme could hardly be claimed to have been played to a deafening crescendo *during* the Viking period in northern England. (2000: 265)

Furthermore, ritual deposition of artefacts, in graves or as hoards, was far from uncommon in England, and only few of the grave goods can be identified as typical Scandinavian. (One of the few exceptions is Bedale, a site that also produced relevant sculpture.) On the other hand, the lack of ‘Scandinavian objects’ does not exclude the possibility of a Scandinavian origin of the deceased: objects of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic origin may have had equally high prestige for Scandinavian traders and settlers as those reflecting their own cultural origins. The presence of grave goods is not a clear indicator of pagan religious practices either, just as Viking graves in Christian graveyards offer no obvious proof of the conversion of the Scandinavians (Wilson 1967: 44–45). Burials at consecrated Christian sites may have been motivated by the recognition of the elevated status of such locations and by a desire for local socio-political continuity among the new settlers.

Rituals associated with death and burial are in general among the first religious practices to be changed among immigrant groups. This, however, is not necessarily due to changes in religion but rather to a separation from the homeland and the lack of individuals who would pass on the rituals and religious practices (Redmond 2007: 11). Christopher Morris (1981: 234–36) argued in favour of the assimilation on the basis of indirect evidence and claimed that one might expect the survival of a larger number of pagan burials if a very large number of pagan Viking graves had existed. Secondly, he preferred an early dating of the finds, which would also support the assimilation theory, and noted that little distinctive material evidence survived of the actual settlements of Scandinavians outside of York, which also points towards a mingling of the population. The iconography of stone carvings does support a certain level of assimilation from early on, but at the same time it points towards a prolific period of transition and cultural integration, which should redirect the focus of our attention from the outcome of the assimilation and conversion to its actual process.

Summing up, we can conclude that the conversion of the Scandinavians in England was the result not of one overreaching missionary policy or campaign, as in the case of several peoples on the Continent between the eighth and the eleventh centuries,⁷ but a combination of three different influences and methods of conversion. There are examples of political or diplomatic conversions in both the South and the North; we can assume some small-scale missionary activity or basic spiritual care ministered by monasteries and proprietary churches in their own vicinities; and finally there was a direct influence of Christian culture in mixed communities. It is the third way that seems to have been characteristic for some of the northern areas in the initial phase of Christianization, but was almost certainly aided by an established (or re-established) pastoral framework of churches and priests by the tenth century and beyond (cf. Abrams 2000: 139). The mixed communities of Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians provided fertile soil for the conversion, but the new converts often retained aspects of their traditional culture. This resulted in a cultural milieu unique to these communities of the Danelaw.

Anglo-Scandinavian Communities

Cohabitation, intensive socio-political and cultural contact, and ultimately the conversion of the Scandinavian settlers resulted in the formation of the so-called Anglo-Scandinavian communities. Even though the term seems not only obvious and handy, but also necessary, a definition thereof is problematic in many ways. The term itself suggests the encounter of two ethnically and culturally distinct groups, but it also presupposes, at least to some extent, a shared social reality and identity of these people.

The birth of the Anglo-Scandinavian communities was facilitated (in addition to political necessity) by cultural convergence, which, in terms of religion, meant the gradual Christianization of the new settlers. Cohabitation and social contact also required a common means of communication. The questions of how long the Norse language was retained, in what form, and how it related to the English of the local population are all surrounded by uncertainties. The linguistic situation

⁷ Organized missionary activity was usually the bishops' task. The lack or insufficiency of missionary activity is suggested by a surviving letter from Pope Formosus to the bishops of the Anglo-Saxon church, written between 891 and 896, in which he blamed them for having failed to act against paganism and reminded them of their responsibilities, but also praised them for their (unspecified) instructional work (Whitelock 1979: 890–92, no. 227; Abrams 2001: 36). In any case, whatever missionary activity the bishops might have initiated, several bishoprics ceased to exist temporarily or for good, and many areas lost episcopal support and control.

in the territories of Scandinavian settlement may have varied significantly, and there is very limited evidence to prove our theories. In the Isle of Man Old Norse was retained into the twelfth century, and runic inscriptions from North-West England suggest Scandinavian influence west of the Pennines as late as *c.* 1100. However, the eastern areas have produced little or no evidence of the longevity of the Norse language (Parsons 2001: 303–05). As far as the relationship between Norse and English is concerned, Matthew Townend supports the view that speakers of Old English and Old Norse were ‘adequately intelligible to one another when each spoke their own language’ (2000: 90). David N. Parsons is more sceptical when stating that ‘English and Norse may, or may not, have been mutually comprehensible’ (2001: 300). The extensive evidence of Norse loanwords into English is indicative of some degree of linguistic assimilation, but whether the mixed communities of Viking-Age England developed a creole Scandinavian English with Norse colouring as their means of communication (Hines 1991) or remained a bilingual society dominantly made up of monolingual speakers of two different but mutually intelligible languages (Townend 2000: 89–105; 2002: 17, 210) remains uncertain.

In the present context (for lack of a better term) ‘Anglo-Scandinavian communities’ should stand for those communities which after the period of conquest and first encounters had already achieved a certain degree of cultural and social integration and developed some sense of a common identity defined by the political and legal framework, but where elements of the Scandinavian cultural tradition (language, artistic styles, narrative material, etc.) were still recognizably distinct, at least to some extent. The gradual cultural convergence that took place in these communities from the mid-ninth to the mid-eleventh century (and beyond) ultimately brought about the assimilation of the Scandinavian settlers and resulted in the formation of a common ‘English’ identity and cultural community.

Conversion and Assimilation as Intellectual Processes

The study of the conversion and assimilation of the Scandinavian settlers in England has so far concentrated largely on chronology, political, social, and economic background and consequences, and the influence on various aspects of English culture, from language through literature to artistic production, that is, on the circumstances and outcome of these processes. However, conversion, Christianization, and cultural assimilation in general are processes also with a significant intellectual component. Therefore, the surviving sculptural evidence presented in the first half of this book will be reconsidered here in order to

uncover some aspects of conversion as intellectual process through its reflection in art. After a theoretical overview of the concept of religious encounters and their manifestations in the wider context of Viking-Age England, I will explore the intellectual framework of figurative thinking that seems to have prompted the choice of images discussed above and served as an organizing principle of the iconography of a number of the sculptures, and at the same time facilitated the conversion process in general. The focus will be on the documentation in sculpture of the middle phases of Christianization: not the question of the initial encounter, nor the final outcome, but rather the nature and stages of cultural and religious adaptation.

Forms of Religious Encounter

According to Clifford Geertz (1993), religion is a meaning-making enterprise, the social construction and maintenance of a system of understandings and symbols that imposes order on the chaos of the universe.⁸ Religion creates a system of meaning, which enables the individual to view the world with a sense of coherence. At the meeting of different religions and cultures, this coherence becomes questioned, and the need arises to alter the existing system of meaning. Religion as meaning-making enterprise operates on two levels: on the one hand it is a social construction, and on the other, a personal experience. In the following these two aspects of religion and religious encounters will be examined, with particular attention to the personal-intellectual aspect of conversion (in Chapter 5).

All religious ideas are culturally embedded and determined, even though theological truths are (or are claimed to be) transcultural (Moreau 2000a: 34). The world view of a community provides a framework of thinking and communication, and the media of expressing ideas are defined by the specific cultural (and technological) context of the community. At the meeting of two different cultural traditions or religions, the different cultural codes have to be matched in order to form one coherent system of meaning. If we take a semiotic approach to culture and interpret it as a system of signs, or rather as a combination of different sign systems, we can approach and interpret cultural changes through changes in one of these sign systems, in this case the visual representation of religious ideas. (Cf. for example, the alteration of the standard Crucifixion iconography on the Gosforth cross.)

⁸ Although Geertz's definition has been challenged by later anthropologists, his recognition of religion as social construction and institution is generally recognized and vital for the present study.

Visual representations have a tendency towards relative stability. Well-established iconographical patterns do not easily 'go out of fashion'; rather they gain a new layer of meaning and become reinterpreted in the new cultural context. Thus they provide a sense of continuity in times of cultural change.⁹ This need of continuity makes total imposition, that is, the entire displacement of the recipient culture, impossible and results in various degrees of integration (at least in the initial phase) when two religions meet.

The encounter of two religions is never the same; every situation is different and unique. Various terms have been created to describe religious encounters, but many of them lack clear definitions. Most of them emerged from missionary theology and practice, and therefore presuppose a conscious and intentional conversion process under the intervention of Christian missionaries. As I pointed out before, the conversion of the Scandinavian settlers was not a missionary situation in the traditional sense. Apart from the small-scale missionary activity or basic spiritual care provided by minsters and proprietary churches in their own vicinities, the Church showed little active involvement in the conversion process. From the perspective of the recipient community, however, the process and result of the encounter is comparable to missionary conversions.

In cultural anthropology, culture change, that is, any shared and relatively enduring transformation of culturally patterned belief or behaviour that results from direct contact between members of two societies, is referred to as 'acculturation' (Winthrop 1991: 3–6, 63). It is related to the concept of assimilation, but while assimilation is a social process, acculturation is a cultural one. Both acculturation and assimilation are processes of homogenization and produce changes in the direction of the dominant culture rather than creating a melting pot of cultural traditions (Levinson and Ember 1996: 112–13). The process of acculturation is characterized by high dynamics and has three phases: (1) establishing contact, (2) conflict and crisis, and (3) adaptation (Rzepkowski 1992: 28). The terms discussed below all refer to the third phase and describe adaptation processes in the course of interaction between two religious systems specifically. 'Adaptation' as a technical term itself¹⁰ is defined in Christian missionary theol-

⁹ The history of early Christian art and symbols is full of examples of the 'recycling of visual forms' originating in other cultures. A large number of popular Christian iconographical representations go back to images borrowed from Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures and were reinterpreted in a Christian context. See Grabar 1968: 31–54.

¹⁰ In anthropology both accommodation and adaptation are used in a fairly broad sense, encompassing various fields of cultural and social activities. Since the present discussion is focused primarily on religious accommodation and conversion, with the dominant component

ogy as ‘changing the form of Christian theological ideas and practice so that they can be understood in a cultural context different from that of the communicator’ (Moreau 2000a: 34). The term is often used interchangeably with ‘accommodation’, which in missionary practice means the accommodation of the rituals, practices, and styles of the missionary’s church to those of the recipient culture (Hunsberger 2000: 31). It indicates a conscious process of adaptation, done with the willingness to adopt some forms of the recipient culture and leave aside some of the sending church.

The underlying idea behind adaptation and accommodation is indigenization, which describes ‘the “translatibility” of the universal Christian faith into the forms and symbols of the particular cultures of the world’ (Conn 2000: 481). This ‘translation’ can take the form of contextualization (or inculturation),¹¹ that is, the integration of values, ideas, and teachings of the church into the recipient culture by the members of the recipient community (Moreau 2000b: 476). It goes beyond accommodation in the sense that it concentrates on the insiders of the recipient culture rather than translating Christian concepts in a new cultural setting by outsiders. Although in missionary terminology contextualization is usually associated with theology, it is manifested in various areas of religious life: in church architecture, rituals, symbols, church administration, or in the present context in visual art and iconography.

Among the terms discussed above, it is contextualization that seems, for now, to describe the situation in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities most accurately, but we have to depart from the missionary theological definition slightly in order to emphasize the mutual nature of this process. It is not quite obvious whether it is only the settling Scandinavians who can be defined as the target group here. The local Anglo-Saxon population was equally influenced by the cultural tradition imported by the new settlers, a tradition that was also familiar to them in many ways and had already found its way (in its related insular form) into Anglo-Saxon Christianity.¹²

being Christianity, the more carefully defined and specific terminology of missionary theology provides a better tool to describe the phenomena in question.

¹¹ Inculturation is generally preferred by Roman Catholics, while contextualization is used by Protestants. The two terms describe basically the same idea. The only difference between the two concerns the role of church tradition, which is more of theological than of practical significance.

¹² James C. Russell (1994: 162) described the two directions of this process in the context of the conversion of the Germanic peoples in the early medieval period as processes of Christianization and Germanization. Russell has been criticized for attributing Germanic influence to phenomena that were by no means unique to Germanic churches; nonetheless, his recognition of the two-way influence in a conversion situation is relevant.

A term that is often used in scholarly literature to describe the process and result of the encounter of the Scandinavians with Christianity is 'syncretism'. In comparative religion and missionary theology syncretism denotes 'the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements' (Moreau 2000c: 925), and as such it has a negative connotation condemning the contamination of the true Christian faith. In cultural anthropology and historical research the meaning of the term has been broadened to a more neutral concept, but it lacks a clear and unambiguous definition. Generally the word syncretism is used to describe 'hybrid religious systems' (Barnard and Spencer 1996: 540), that is, any mixture of two or more religions where elements of one religious system are adapted into another, and the two or more religious systems merge and influence each other mutually (Ringgren 1969: 7). Sometimes it is also used in cases when elements of one religion are accepted into another without changing the character of the receiving religion, even though in those cases the term 'accommodation' is more preferable. Syncretism always denotes a transitional phase; therefore it is usually a dynamic and short-lived phenomenon.

The ambiguity of the definition is rooted in the fact that every encounter of religions is unique. In order to understand the nature of a particular encounter, it has to be examined in a social, political, and intellectual context, besides the traditional historical and philological approaches usually taken. There are two main things to be examined here: the conditions of the encounter, that is, the external factors that necessitated the adaptation process, and the result or outcome.

The Situation in Northern England

The Conditions

The adaptation or accommodation of foreign elements in a religious system is usually motivated by discontent with the present religion, which can result from a change in the social, political, and economic conditions of a community and its openness to the religion of the neighbours which can offer answers to the new questions. The need of accommodation and conversion was created in the Anglo-Scandinavian settlement areas by a change in the political, social, and economic circumstances. The former raiders and warriors from Scandinavia settled down in areas populated by the Anglo-Saxons, and their leaders formed a new type of social elite in these communities. In economic terms they converted from raiders to farmers and traders and created an agricultural society with a strong element

of commerce, especially in the York metropolitan area and the coastal areas. The new settlers' interest in Christianity was motivated by political and social pressure and by a need for social integration. Different social groups had different levels of motivation in the conversion. Christianity as a social institution represented power, both political and intellectual, which appealed to the new Scandinavian elite, and as the religion of the local population it also proved to be a means of social integration for the rest of the settlers who engaged in economic and social interaction, such as intermarriage, with the local population. Even though it was mostly Scandinavians who seem to have constituted the social elite in the areas of Viking settlement, the social prestige of Anglo-Saxon Christianity seemed higher than that of their native religion, which led to openness towards it on the part of the new settlers.

This openness towards Christianity was promoted not only by social needs, but also by the structural openness and flexibility of the native religious system itself. The Norse paganism of the settlers was a non-codified, non-centralized, and non-institutionalized religion with considerable regional differences that was more open to adopting foreign influences than universal religions (such as Christianity itself). Finally a certain psychological readiness and intellectual ability on the part of individuals was also needed to facilitate the accommodation process. This way of thinking, which is best characterized as figurative thinking, will be examined more closely in the next chapter.

The Outcome

The ultimate result of the encounter of the Scandinavian settlers with Christianity was their conversion to the new religion. However, this process was a gradual one and stretched over a few generations. The carvings with mythological and heroic iconography, all created within an interval of less than two centuries (from the late ninth to early eleventh centuries), illustrate an early and creative phase of the encounter of the two religions, that of accommodation and contextualization, where elements of the traditional religion and lore were still recognized and associated, to varying degrees, with their original cultural context, even if their user communities had already set off in the direction of accepting Christianity. The integration of native elements is understandable if we consider that the only way the Scandinavians could understand Christianity was through the thought patterns of their old religion (cf. Ringgren 1969: 12). (The iconographical programme of the Gosforth cross provides an excellent example of this phenomenon, using the Norse apocalyptic narrative of Ragnarök as a stepping stone towards

understanding the significance of the Crucifixion and the Christian apocalypse.) However, the integrated native elements disappeared within a few generations, probably due to the opposition of the Church and the influence of institutionalized Christian teaching. The accommodation was a short-lived phenomenon, at least in terms of artistic production, which shows the relatively fast adaptation of the settlers to local conditions.

As documents of this early phase of adaptation, many of the carvings demonstrate some sense of amalgamation between Scandinavian religion and culture and Anglo-Saxon Christianity, perhaps most prominently the Gosforth cross and the 'Fishing Stone'. John McKinnell (1989: 50) denied the idea of syncretism in this context, and argued for only an exemplary use of the pagan material by unfavourable comparison to the superior and predetermined Christian message. To me such a direct opposition seems unlikely. Many of the carvings with iconographical elements of Norse mythological and heroic origin functioned as commemorative monuments, and the commemorative use of these motifs must presuppose a positive attitude towards the gods and heroes depicted. There is clearly a certain degree of adaptation here in terms of demythologizing these characters and stories and integrating them into the Christian culture and into the Christian artistic tradition. However, the two religions never merged in the traditional sense of syncretism, and the system of Christian thought remained largely unaltered. It was only enriched and 'illustrated' by the pagan elements, because a need was felt to integrate or accommodate certain aspects of the original religion to promote the understanding of the new religion and to satisfy specific socio-cultural needs.

Differences between the Old and the New Religions

The socio-cultural differences were also reflected in the fundamental differences between the old and the new religions. Pre-Christian religion in Scandinavia was not a systematic religion and not necessarily a separate religious sphere but an integral part of people's daily lives and everyday practices (Andrén 2006: 37). The social and cultural background of Norse paganism was the heroic warrior society, which provided and was manifested in a rich oral tradition. The main concepts and ethics of the heroic tradition, and pre-Christian Germanic religion in general,¹³ differed from the Christian teaching and had to be reconciled with it.

¹³ Due to the diverse nature of Germanic paganism both in temporal and geographical terms, it is more precise to use the term Scandinavian or Norse (or Nordic) paganism to refer

The acceptance of Christianity required and meant more than the introduction of the cult of a new deity who had to be incorporated into the existing pantheon. The radical monotheism of Christianity discredited all other deities and demanded undivided devotion towards the only God, which called into question the cornerstones of the old world order. Consequently, Christianity restructured the traditional ethical system and imposed a new direction on history.

The religion of the Germanic peoples (and so the Norse religion of the Viking Age) was a predominantly world-accepting and folk-centred one, as opposed to the predominantly world-rejecting, individualistic, and soteriological world view of Christianity (Russell 1994: 176). Its this-world-oriented and folk-centred nature was also reflected in its temporal orientation: instead of focusing on the future and eschatology, as Christianity did, Germanic paganism was primarily past-oriented, because it was the past that shaped the present of the community and the individual and formed their shared cultural identity. The conversion to Christianity required a complete reorientation in temporal sense: what the future-oriented and eschatological Christianity could offer was basically freeing the believer from this world that he had no desire to be parted from (cf. Bauschatz 1982: 154). The past, in which the shared identity of the Germanic communities was deeply rooted, had to be incorporated into the temporal sequence of Christianity in order to preserve the continuation of cultural values and some degree of cultural integrity.

There were also a number of discrepancies on the level of basic concepts. Death and sacrifice had a different significance and meaning, and the new god, Christ the Lord, was interpreted as a leader of heroic qualities in spite of his sacrificial role (cf. for example, *The Dream of the Rood* or the discussion of the Gosforth cross above). In the traditional religion death was not seen as the absolute end, but rather a transition into a different kind of existence, and also a means to earn the reward of fame and remembrance in the community, which secured a continuous place in this world, instead of an abstract spiritual reward in the afterlife. Scandinavian paganism seems to have had little or no spiritual conceptions of life after death; it was more concentrated on the reality of present life (Ellis 1943: 147).¹⁴ It is unlikely that they saw a dualistic division between the dead body and a further existing soul. In the case of barrow burials, the dead

to the religion of the Scandinavian settlers. However, since many of the statements below do equally apply to various Germanic peoples, continental, insular, or Scandinavian, the more general (and admittedly imprecise) term of Germanic paganism will also be used.

¹⁴ Admittedly, it is hardly possible to generalize about the Germanic concepts of life after death. Burial customs provide no information about the exact kind of life after death or the form

continued to exist in the graves in their physical forms, often bearing marks of the means of their death, and they took various supplies of this life with them in the form of grave goods (DuBois 1999: 74–78). Life continued but in an altered form and in a place inaccessible for the living.

As we have seen above, the Norse concept of Valhalla underwent some changes in the course of time, but it was essentially a positive place, a hall of feasting and fighting. Originally Hel, another realm of the dead, was not a place of punishment either, and the criteria on the basis of which one was received there after death did not correspond to the Christian concept of sin. The obsession with salvation and the fear of hell that inspired medieval men only entered the scene later (Le Goff 1988: 187) when the concept of sin in a Christian sense became incorporated into the ethical system. Instead of the fear of death and punishment, it was the fear of loss, especially in a social sense that worried members of the warrior society.¹⁵

The social circumstances and ethical code of the warrior society also influenced the role of the individual worshipper. Compared to believers of the Christian faith, adherents of Norse paganism, which entailed a strong component of ancestor worship, were characterized as thinking more collectively and as being more community centred and community dependent. The individual worshippers experienced their gods as supernatural companions rather than omnipotent spiritual entities. Even though a few references to oaths and invocations are recorded in literary sources, praying seems to have been primarily a sacerdotal duty, and the main facets of Norse religion were sacrifice and ethics (Ström 1990: 374). Through the combined sacral and socio-political roles of the religious leaders called *goðar* (sg. *goði*), temple priests and local chieftains in one, religion was an integral part of society, a way of living and social behaviour. Christianity not only altered this intimate integration of society and belief but also initiated a major change in the way people perceived the relationship of man and nature. It forced a sharper division between animate and inanimate, between the living and the dead, and ultimately between man and nature.¹⁶

of existence, and most of the extant literary sources, especially Snorri's account of Hel, already show Christian influence.

¹⁵ Various aspects of loss found their elaborate literary manifestations in the Old English elegies of the Exeter Book.

¹⁶ The speaking cross of *The Dream of the Rood* as well as a number of riddles in the Exeter Book reflect the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons' intimate relation to the world of inanimate things and its survival in the insular Christian tradition.

The Viking Impact: Addition, Revival, or Strengthening?

According to historians during the Victorian era, the Danes were a second wave of 'English' settlers 'bringing back to an England that had forgotten its origins the barbaric England of its pirate forefathers' (Green 1874: 43, cited in Trafford 2000: 22). Worded this way, this is of course not true, but the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavian invaders were not as different culturally as is often suggested. As we have seen above, several aspects of the religion of the Scandinavian settlers had been present in some form in the native religion of the Anglo-Saxons, and traits of Anglo-Saxon paganism survived in the Christianized communities in the form of folk traditions and popular piety, or became incorporated into the insular tradition of Christianity. Due to the shared Germanic cultural tradition of the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians as well as the presence of syncretic elements in Anglo-Saxon Christianity, it is sometimes difficult to detect the nature and degree of the influence of the new settlers. For example, were the Yorkshire Wayland carvings the result of the reintroduction of the myth in a different form and with a different iconography, or is the fact that Wayland appears on crosses an indication that the carvers were building on an already existing appreciation of the archetypal smith in a Christian context? Or in the case of Ripon 4A, does the thumb-sucking figure in the cross-head indicate an innovative use of an imported Sigurd motif, or is it an example of an already existing iconographical pattern of Celtic origin in a Christian context that may have gained new connotations through its resemblance to the well-known Germanic image? To what extent has the Ragnarök story and its imagery on the Gosforth cross been influenced by Christianity even before it appeared on the monument? Many of the carvings presented in the previous chapters prompt similar questions and remind us of the complexity of origins and the cross-currents of influences in the culture of early medieval England and the North Atlantic region.

By the time of the arrival of the Viking raiders and settlers, a unique insular version of Christian culture developed in Anglo-Saxon England, which was based upon a number of different cultural traditions that made up or influenced Anglo-Saxon culture. The eldest, pre-Anglo-Saxon layer was the Romano-British culture that developed during the Roman occupation. The first Christian communities that were formed in the late Roman period had largely disappeared by the time of the arrival of the Germanic tribes, but a few places do show some continuity of worship. The invading Germanic tribes (the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians) forced much of the local Romano-British and Celtic population to the western and northern areas of the island, to Ireland, and to the western shore of the Continent and assimilated the remaining local population. The invaders

brought along their continental Germanic paganism and a rich oral tradition from their homelands, but they soon became the target of Christian missionary efforts from two directions. Roman Christianity arrived with St Augustine in 597, sent by Pope Gregory the Great, and targeted the kingdom of Kent and the southern regions, while adherents of Celtic Christianity started Christianizing the northern areas in the early seventh century. Differences between the two churches, rooted in liturgical, organizational, and political matters, were resolved at the Synod of Whitby in 664, which ended with the acceptance of the supremacy of Rome. In addition to the introduction of the Christian faith, both Roman and Celtic Christianity brought along additional cultural influences, Mediterranean and Celtic respectively, which had already been incorporated into Christianity and which manifested themselves primarily in art and literature.

St Gregory's missionary policy, as documented in his letter to Mellitus in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, i. 30), promoted tolerance towards the native culture and religion and ultimately resulted in the accommodation of indigenous cultural elements in Christianity and the formation of the Anglo-Saxon or insular Christian culture. The following centuries saw the creation of a number of literary and artistic works that merged the native Germanic tradition with Christian culture and lore. For example, *Judith*, *Exodus*, Cynewulf's *Elene*, and the depiction of the Last Judgement in *Christ* all make use of traditional heroic imagery and give a heroic overtone to their Christian subject matter. The most outstanding example of this tendency is *The Dream of the Rood* (and its earlier and shorter runic version on the Ruthwell cross), where the cross appears as a retainer, Christ as a heroic warrior, and the Crucifixion as a heroic act (implying the conflict of sacrifice and murder), and where faith is described in terms of loyalty and appears in accordance with the heroic code of the society. As an example from the visual arts, the Franks Casket displays the mixing of three different traditions: Roman (semi-)history, Germanic heroic and mythological narratives, and biblical history.

From a Christian perspective, the encounter with the Vikings and their culture launched a second phase of 'Germanization' of Christianity. For the Christian Anglo-Saxons some of the imported cultural material might have appeared new and unfamiliar, but most stories, gods, and heroes were well known from their own native tradition. The import of the Scandinavian narrative material and its iconography enriched the culture of the Anglo-Saxon communities in various ways and to various degrees. In some cases new stories and narrative elements, such as certain episodes of the Ragnarök story or aspects of Valhalla, may have been introduced, alongside new poetic styles, imagery, and iconography. Some stories of gods and heroes that circulated in the British Isles already in the pre-

Viking period experienced a shift of emphasis as a result of the encounter with the northern version of the same myth (for example, the element of flight seems to have become the focus of interest in the Wayland legend), or the insular tradition underwent some degree of modification in the Scandinavian settlement areas, as in the case of the valkyrie tradition. Finally, the Hiberno-Norse settlers of the western areas also popularized Christian and non-Christian elements in art that originated in the Celtic tradition (such as the hart-and-hound motif and ring-headed crosses).

For most Scandinavians the encounter with Christianity on English soil was of course not the first contact with the new religion. They had encountered Christianity through previous cultural and trade contacts, during their raids on the Continent, and during their settlement in Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man.¹⁷ Christianity also offered several points of similarity with the native religion, which facilitated a smooth accommodation process and openness to the new religion. For example, the idea of a dying god who rose again was known from ancient fertility myths, the sacrificed god hanging upon a tree was familiar from the myth of Odin on Yggdrasil, and the bound demon and the concept of doomsday with all its horrors were all part of the pagan tradition even before intensive exposure to Christianity (Davidson 1982: 124). The first step towards the acceptance of Christianity was the recognition of these shared elements and their accommodation into the new tradition.¹⁸

Christian Approaches to Paganism

Before turning to the assessment of the cultural and intellectual process taking place in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities, one more thing needs to be considered briefly. This is the attitude of the Christian Anglo-Saxons to pagan

¹⁷ Some early syncretic aspects of Norse paganism, which had been pointed out among others by Sophus Bugge (1889) already at the end of the nineteenth century in connection with the Balder myth and Odin's sacrifice on Yggdrasil, might have originated in a pre-conversion influence of Christianity on the northern tradition.

¹⁸ Earlier encounters of the Germanic tribes with Roman culture and its distinct world view also had a crucial impact on the development of Germanic cosmology that became more explicit and more systematic than before (Andrén, Jennbert, and Raudvere 2006: 37). The encounter with Christianity seems to have had a similar effect on the Norse belief system and cosmology: it resulted in the restructuring and systematization of concept, ideas, and narratives and undoubtedly some level of borrowing from early on. On a very basic level, this reorganization should probably be considered the initial step towards Christianization.

gods and practices of native and later of Scandinavian origin, which reflects the contemporaries' approach to the problem of religious encounter.

The surviving textual sources from the pre-Viking period reveal hardly any explicit information about early Anglo-Saxon paganism. The only unambiguous references to pagan practices in pre-Viking England are Pope Gregory's letter to Mellitus and the account of King Edwin's conversion in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (I. 30 and II. 13, respectively), Bede's comment on the pagan names of the months (*De mensibus anglorum*) in *The Reckoning of Time* (*De temporum ratione*), and Aldhelm's letter (no. 5) to Heahfrið (Johnson 1995: 35). The names of heathen gods have been preserved in a number of place-names as well as in the English names of the weekdays (Tiw in Old English *tiwesdaeg*, 'Tuesday', Woden in Old English *wodnesdaeg*, 'Wednesday', Thor in Old English *þursdaeg*, 'Thursday', and Frigg in Old English *frigedæg*, 'Friday'), coined after the Latin equivalents. The survival of the pagan tradition is indirectly reflected in literature and art in a number of deliberate attempts to harmonize pagan and Christian elements. In *Beowulf*, for example, the pagan monster Grendel is interpreted as an offspring of Cain, and the Franks Casket shows Wayland sharing the front panel with the Adoration of the Magi. Besides being a natural approach to reconcile competing cultural traditions, moderate harmonization was also promoted by the early missionaries, following the advice of Pope Gregory to adapt pagan practices to Christian use rather than prohibit them. Ultimately pagan gods and heroes found their way not only into Christian poetry and art but also into several royal genealogies and became integrated into the respectable and legitimate past of the Christian Anglo-Saxons.

It is hard to know how much the Anglo-Saxons preserved from their heathen traditions and actual practices by the time of the arrival of the Scandinavian raiders and settlers, and what form of Germanic paganism the Vikings practised at the time of the settlement. Late Anglo-Saxon sources, such as Æthelweard's *Chronicon* and Ælfric's *De falsis diis*, show that there was some interest in the pagan past as well as some knowledge of the heathen tradition (native and Scandinavian) in the ecclesiastical circles of the early eleventh century. Ælfric's relation to his pagan material was probably characteristic for other southern ecclesiastics of the period. He had only little detailed knowledge of the pagan gods and practices of his Anglo-Saxon ancestors and of the Scandinavians, but he was certainly familiar with Bede's aforementioned works. In spite of the clearly oppositional standpoint taken in his *De falsis diis*, he carefully 'toned down' the demonization of the pagan gods compared to his source for the sermon, Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum*. Interestingly enough, he also avoided mentioning the Anglo-Saxon forms of the gods' names. According to David

Johnson (1995: 59), he was motivated by political considerations, especially in omitting any demonization of Woden, since Woden was remembered as an ancestor in many royal genealogies, including that of Wessex. He probably did make the connection between Odin and Woden, and he could also expect his audience to do so. However, while the two versions of the god were seen as referring to one and the same deity, their cults were judged differently: while his veneration among the Danes was condemned, his euhemeristic interpretation among the Anglo-Saxons was accepted.

The example of Ælfric suggests a double approach to paganism among the Christian Anglo-Saxons, especially in ecclesiastical circles. While a radical approach of diabolizing heathen gods and demonizing all beings of lower mythology, together with the condemnation of pagan practices, was readily applied in connection with the Scandinavians (often labelled as ‘pagans’), a euhemeristic approach of historicizing saved the gods and heroes of the insular tradition as well as the reputation of the pagan ancestors of the English.

The historicizing approach of euhemerism was based on the presupposition that previous generations of respectable pagan ancestors were in error regarding their religious beliefs. Their so-called gods were merely mortal men of stature from the distant past who, through the respect of their descendants, became falsely worshipped as gods.¹⁹ The concept of euhemerism was named after Euhemerus of Messene (c. 300 BC), who described the ancient Greek gods as outstanding but mortal people who, after dying normal deaths, were buried in places that he could identify. His work was translated into Latin by (N)ennius, but both the original and the translation were lost except for a few quotations, mostly in Diodorus Siculus and in Lactantius. The euhemeristic interpretation of pagan gods was eagerly accepted by the early Church Fathers who applied it in dealing with classical pagan deities.²⁰ The earliest occurrence of the statement that all pagan gods were mere men is found in the *Cohortatio ad gentes* of Clement

¹⁹ Strictly speaking, euhemerism explains only the origin of the gods, but not how they continued to be worshipped throughout generations. In order to explain that, two theories had been advanced. According to the first, mankind had been deceived by poets and myth-makers who had fabricated the stories of their deification and powers. The second explanation claimed that the so-called gods came to possess actual power (1) through the influence of demons or satanic forces, or (2) through the influence of planets, of the same name in the case of classical gods (Cooke 1927: 396).

²⁰ The Hebraic background for euhemeristic interpretation was provided in the Book of Wisdom (14. 15–21), which explains some ways in which idolatry originated. Echoes of this passage are found in many of the Fathers.

of Alexandria (115–217), and was later taken up by Tertullian, Minucius Felix, Lactantius, Eusebius, and St Augustine of Hippo (Cooke 1927: 397–99). Euhemerization in the apologetic and patristic tradition almost always involved the concept of demonization as well, which was based on Psalm 96. 5, contrasting pagan gods with the Lord, the maker of heaven. St Augustine emphasized the diabolical nature of heathen gods and interpreted them as malign spirits who tricked men into worshipping them. It was Isidore of Seville who broke with the tradition of diabolization and separated the demonic from the euhemeristic. He developed a positive view of the pagan gods whom he saw as heroic figures of history, the leaders and pioneers of civilization, and thus the benefactors of humanity (Seznec 1961: 13–15).

In Anglo-Saxon England the euhemeristic interpretation of pagan gods seems to have been accepted already in the early eighth century, as is apparent in a letter of Bishop Daniel of Winchester to St Boniface (no. 23, dated 722–32) on converting the heathen in Germany, and it continued to flourish throughout Anglo-Saxon period. The notion of euhemerization also prevailed in medieval Iceland, where Christian authors, especially Snorri Sturluson, felt the need to reconcile the conflicts between their native tradition and Christianity. In the *Prose Edda* and the *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla*, Snorri made an attempt to rationalize his pagan sources without demonizing the gods of his ancestors. He inserted his gods temporally and geographically in world history and explained them as ancient heroes worshipped by men who had lost their true understanding of God. The significance of this attempt of historicizing and euhemerizing, both in Anglo-Saxon England and later in Iceland, was that it saved the pagan deities from being condemned while also integrating the pagan mythical past into the history of the ancient world, both biblical and antique.

The Anglo-Scandinavian Communities Revisited: The Process of Accommodation

As the above overview has shown, the cultural and intellectual process of integration that took place in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities of northern England and found its visual expression in the stone carvings can be approached and defined in various ways. The terms contextualization, syncretism, and euhemerization all reveal important aspects of the process, but at the same time ignore others. It is important to emphasize that this cultural and religious integration process in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities was primarily socially motivated, happened more or less spontaneously, that is, without explicit

missionary effort, although probably aided by some level of local pastoral network, and was facilitated by the openness of the Scandinavian religious system and the intellectual readiness of the members of the communities. The ultimate (yet unconscious) goal of the process was to bring into concord conflicting views of the world in order to enable the settlers to adapt to the new social and political circumstances. This is exactly what the word 'accommodate' refers to in its original meaning: to make fit, suitable, or congruous, to bring into agreement or concord. It is therefore perhaps the word 'accommodation' that describes this process most accurately if we free this loaded term from most of its previous theoretical connotations.

The carvings examined above, our visual documents of this cultural process, suggest that their sculptors, patrons, and audience were familiar, at least to some extent, with both the Scandinavian and the Christian religious systems, and they were willing to compare them. Since the monuments are primarily Christian by nature, and most (if not all) of them are associated with ecclesiastical sites, the accommodation process can be defined as an integration of the pagan gods and heroes (as well as certain heroic concepts) into the Christian system. This presupposes not only a conceptual and ethical, but also a temporal readjustment and calls for a reconciliation of the Germanic and Christian concepts of time and history.

However, the phenomenon that characterizes Anglo-Scandinavian communities of northern England goes beyond euhemerism, which only grasps the process from a Christian point of view. In addition to the integration (or temporal reconciliation) of pagan gods and heroes and Christian history, parallels are drawn between them and the Christian tradition, finding correspondences between the two systems, approaching one system in terms of the other by accommodating and contextualizing elements of one tradition in terms of those of the other tradition. The uniqueness of this intellectual process reflected on Viking-Age carvings had been recognized in the scholarly literature. In the context of the Gosforth 'Fishing Stone', Richard Bailey (1981: 87) described it as 'radical theological speculation' and a 'commentary from one theological system on another'. Commenting on the similarly creative use of Sigurd carvings on Norwegian stave church portals, Anders Bugge (1953: 36) called it 'pagan iconography of Christian ideas' (translated in Bailey 1980: 124). Hilda R. E. Davidson pointed out the difficulty of determining the borderline between pagan and Christian in cases of obvious parallels between some incidents from the Christian tradition and others from pagan myths, and noted that 'the sculptors themselves may have rejoiced in such parallels, and may have used them deliberately, turning a pre-Christian story to a new use' (1950: 124). It seems beyond dispute that craftsmen

like the Gosforth Master or the carvers of the Leeds crosses were aware of obvious parallels between heathen legends and Christian teaching.

The comparison of characters and stories in search of shared references and the confirmation of a sense of unity by finding parallels recall the Christian interpretative strategy of typology, an approach that was well known in Anglo-Saxon England and influenced medieval thinking in general. The similarity of typology to the comparison between Norse mythological and biblical narratives had already been recognized by Brage Larsen (1968: 43) and Klaus Düwel (1986: 267–70) in connection with the Sigurd story and by Otto Gschwantler (1968: 163) regarding Thor's fishing. Typology was of course an interpretative and exegetical tool of educated Christians; therefore it cannot be applied directly to explain the Viking-Age monuments. Similarities and differences between typology and the intellectual background of the accommodation process that took place in the Anglo-Scandinavian communities will be explored in the next chapter.

THE INTELLECTUAL FRAMEWORK: FIGURATIVE THINKING

Typology and/versus Figurative Thinking

As an interpretative method of biblical exegesis, the search for shared patterns throughout history is denoted with the term typology. Since sculptural evidence suggests a certain degree of comparison between the pagan and Christian narrative traditions with respect to various kinds of shared patterns, typology, and a criticism thereof, seems to be an obvious starting point to understand the intellectual and interpretative framework of the iconographical programmes of the monuments as well as the working of the minds who created them.

Typology has long shaped the organization and iconographical programmes of Christian works of art; thus an association of this exegetical interpretative method with visual arts is by no means unusual. Typological representations appeared already in early Christian art (for example, the Old Testament scenes of catacomb paintings prefiguring salvation and redemption, the picture cycles on the doors of S. Sabina in Rome, or the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus). Its early presence in the British Isles — in fact, the very first reference to visual typology in early medieval Western art — is recorded by the Venerable Bede in his *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow* (*Historia abbatum*) (chapter 9), where he describes pictures brought back by Benedict Biscop from Rome to Jarrow and set up on the walls of the church arranged in typological concordance:

Nam et tunc dominicae historiae picturas quibus totam beatae Dei genetricis, quam in monasterio maiore fecerat, aecclesiam in gyro coronaret, adtulit; imagines quoque ad ornandum monasterium aecclesiamque beati Pauli apostoli de concordia ueteris et noui Testamenti summa ratione conpositas exhibuit; uerbi gratia,

Isaac ligna, quibus inmolaretur portantem, et Dominum crucem in qua pateretur aequae portantem, proxima super inuicem regione, pictura coniunxit. Item serpenti in heremo a Moyse exaltato, Filium hominis in cruce exaltatum comparauit. (Plummer 1896: I, 373)

[He brought back paintings of the life of Our Lord for the chapel of the Holy Mother of God which he had built within the main monastery, setting them, as its crowning glory, all the way around the walls. His treasures included a set of pictures for the monastery and church of the blessed apostle Paul, consisting of scenes, very skillfully arranged, to show how the Old Testament foreshadowed the New. In one set, for instance, the picture of Isaac carrying the wood on which he was to be burnt as a sacrifice was placed immediately below that of Christ carrying the cross on which He was about to suffer. Similarly the Son of Man lifted up on the cross was paired with the serpent raised up by Moses in the desert.] (trans. Farmer 1983: 194)

As Bede's description indicates, typology was present from early on in the Christian art of the British Isles, embedded in an exegetical practice that spans the entire Anglo-Saxon period, from Bede to Ælfric and beyond. As an intellectual practice it could indeed provide the mental furniture (from an educated Christian perspective) to accommodate the foreign narrative tradition in Viking-period sculpture, although never as explicitly visualized as in the church of St Paul in Jarrow.

Typology

Typology is a hermeneutic concept in which a biblical place (Jerusalem, Zion), person (Adam, Melchizedek), event (flood, brazen serpent), institution (feast, covenant), office (prophet, priest, king), or object (tabernacle, altar, incense) becomes a pattern by which later persons or places are interpreted due to the unity of events within salvation history (Osborne 1988: 930). Typological interpretation is essentially the recognition of these patterns of salvation events, where (usually) Old Testament events anticipate New Testament ones. The anticipations are called types, the fulfilments antitypes. In addition to links between the Old and the New Testaments, there are several correspondences within the Old Testament, and there is also valid typological relationship between New Testament imagery and its fulfilment in the description of the end times.

The Bible itself contains several references of typological nature: Jesus himself talks about Jonah as a paradigm of his own death and resurrection (Matthew 12. 39, 16. 4; Luke 11. 29), Noah's salvation is associated with baptism (1 Peter 3. 20–21), and the sacrifice of Isaac appears as the type of Christ's sacrificial

death (Hebrews 11. 17 and 19; Galatians 3. 15–16). The origin of typological interpretation goes back to St Paul, who was the first to call the Hebrew Bible the 'Old Testament'. This appellation presupposes not only a correspondence between the events described there and the life of Christ, and thus recognizes the unity of the two testaments, but it also emphasizes the fulfilment of the Old Testament events in the New Testament. The Church Fathers blended typology with Hellenistic allegory and replaced the historical focus of the biblical period with a spiritual sense, which led to some degree of terminological confusion in medieval practice.¹

Following in the footsteps of the Church Fathers, typological interpretation was also embraced among the Anglo-Saxons. In addition to Bede's reference to visual typology in the church of St Paul in Jarrow and his theoretical considerations in *The Art of Poetry and Rhetoric* (*De arte metrica et de schematibus tropis*), he uses typological references also in his own exegetical commentaries, for example, on Genesis, where he refers to the equation between the horns of the ram and the ends of the cross. Or to give a late Anglo-Saxon example, Ælfric, in the preface to his translation of Genesis, says that Abraham prefigured (or with the Old English expression *hafde getacnunge*, 'signified, indicated, or denoted') the Father while Isaac was the prefiguration of Christ, who was sacrificed for our redemption.

Typological interpretation is based on the idea of the unity of history through God's plan of salvation. Since salvation history is documented in the two Testaments of the Bible, traditionally types are taken from the Old Testament and antitypes from the New Testament. These scriptural types are the instruments of prophecy which point towards the fulfilment of the promise of salvation. Typological prophecy occurs throughout the Bible and can be considered the

¹ In his discussion of allegory in *The Art of Poetry and Rhetoric* (*De arte metrica et de schematibus tropis*), Bede clearly distinguishes between historical allegory and verbal allegory and lists a number of varieties of this trope. By historical allegory he means an event in time that refers to another reality outside of itself, in other words, which prefigures an event typologically. For a 'proper' use of the term allegory he refers to Pope Gregory the Great, who in his *Moralia* uses the term in a restricted sense referring only to typological allegory (cf. Bede 1991: 192–200 (Latin) / 199–207 (English), especially p. 207 and pp. 25–28 (Kendall's introduction)). The clear-cut differentiation between typology and allegory is a modern theoretical phenomenon that arose from the need for clarity of terminology. According to modern definitions, in typology 'the relationship between type and antitype is real and historical, based upon an analogous correspondence that exists between them. An allegory is indirect and implicit, based upon a metaphorical correspondence between spiritual ideas that lie under the text rather than within it' (Osborne 1988: 931).

usual way that the prophets, including Jesus, spoke of the future (Garrett 1996: 785). The unity of events in redemptive history is manifested in patterns recurring according to God's plan. The Greek word *týpos* (τύπος) meaning 'pattern, model, imprint' grasps this concept of shared patterns. The real model is actually in the antitype, which is not only 'pre-figured' in the type but also fulfils it, completing the divine purpose implicit in the earlier events.

Even though typological interpretation commonly focuses on links between the Old and the New Testaments, types can also be found outside the Old Testament, and even outside the scripture. Coping with cultural traditions of various origins and trying to justify the legitimacy of non-biblical traditions, primarily Hellenic and Roman, the early Fathers soon discovered a number of links between the Bible and their native traditions and interpreted non-biblical narratives and historical events as types. To describe these special cases of Christian typological thinking, Friedrich Ohly introduced the terms 'semi-biblical typology' (*halbbiblische Typologie*) for the cases when either the type or the antitype is non-biblical, and 'non-biblical typology' (*außerbiblische Typologie*) for the cases when neither the type nor the antitype comes from the Bible, yet the basis of their relatedness lies in Christian (biblical) teaching.² Examples for semi-biblical typology are the concordance between Orpheus or Socrates and Christ, or between Solomon and Constantine the Great. Non-biblical typological interpretations are, for example, Virgil and Ovid as types and Juvenecus as their antitype, or Alexander the Great as the type of the Antichrist, or the Pantheon as a prefiguration of St Peter's in Rome (Ohly 1977b: 366). Ohly's two terms have been criticized for being illegitimate and incompatible with theological teaching. Whether we insist on using the word typology for describing this phenomenon or not, it is without doubt that an analytical thinking with respect to shared patterns did exist already among the early Fathers and in their communities that had to cope with different cultural heritages.

Ohly's semi-biblical typology seems to be a tempting approach to explain the iconography of the Viking-Age monuments discussed above; however, it does not describe the phenomenon perfectly. Similarly to typology, the organizing thought behind the choice of images on the sculptures (manifested in varying degree of explicitness) is centred on establishing links and cross-references and finding parallels between biblical and non-biblical, or more generally between Christian and non-Christian elements. However, it is not nearly as systematic as typology, and the biblical or Christian parallel or 'antitype' does not necessarily

² The two terms were first introduced by Ohly in 1940 in his *Sage und Legende in der Kaiserchronik*. For a detailed discussion of the terms, cf. Ohly 1977b. See also Ohly 1977a.

fulfil the non-Christian 'type' in which it is prefigured, or rather by which it is paralleled. Therefore, it is more appropriate to see the iconography of the sculptures as evidence of a particular type of thinking which is based on the recurrence of patterns. Using the well-known word 'figura'³ for these patterns, I suggest the term 'figurative thinking' to describe this intellectual phenomenon.

The Concept of Figurative Thinking

Figura, figurative thinking, and figural interpretation are by no means new terms in medieval scholarship. For decades the study of typological interpretation has been dominated by Erich Auerbach's essay 'Figura' and his definition of figural (i.e. typological) interpretation. The Auerbachian understanding of figural interpretation heavily influenced the use of the term in the study of medieval exegesis and literature.⁴

Auerbach's understanding of typological interpretation is characterized by four major features (after Emerson 1992). (1) Auerbach operates with a strict definition of typology, according to which it is an exegetical method with types taken from the Old Testament and antitypes from the New Testament, even though there are New Testament types as well as profane and pagan examples known from the early Fathers on. Auerbach also dismisses symbols as prefigurations (e.g. the brazen serpent that Moses raised before the Israelites, which often features in medieval art as a prefiguration of the Crucifixion). (2) He privileges historical events (over literary symbols and prophetic images) found in historical narratives (rather than in poetic, prophetic, and other literary forms). (3) He emphasizes the type over the antitype, even though from a Christian point of view it is the truth revealed by the antitype that matters. (4) He makes a radical distinction between figural interpretation and other forms of exegesis such as allegory and the other levels of biblical interpretation. As I have already pointed out above, this distinction makes sense for modern interpretative purposes, but it does not reflect medieval exegetical practice, where common allegory was also called *figura*, while historic prefiguration could be termed *allegoria* as well as *figura* and *typus*.

³ The original Latin word *figura* means 'shape, plastic form' (from *ingere*, 'to form, shape, mold, fashion'), which happens to fit nicely with this study of sculpture.

⁴ Auerbach's essay was originally published in German in 1938 and reprinted in Istanbul in 1944. An English translation by Ralph Manheim was published years later, in 1959, in a collection of essays which was reprinted in 1984. All references to the essay are based on the latter edition.

To differentiate between Auerbach's concept of figural interpretation and my understanding of the intellectual process discussed, I suggest a terminological distinction between the Auerbachian 'figural' interpretation as it is used in the 1959 English translation of the original German article and 'figurative' thinking in the context of Viking-Age northern England. The key difference between the two terms can be summarized as follows: while Auerbach's figural interpretation is based on strict biblical typology, and thus operates in type-antitype relations and the fulfilment of the earlier type in the later antitype, figurative thinking establishes connections between biblical and non-biblical events and characters with little or no emphasis on their temporal sequence and no fulfilment of a prophecy in the typological sense. The latter is therefore not a conscious interpretative method directed to scripture, but rather a mindset or mental furniture.

Both Auerbach's figural interpretation and figurative thinking share the idea of certain patterns being repeated in history, which creates a coherence of history and connections between events and people separated in time. But while figural interpretation presupposes a teleological concept of history (the grand plan of salvation), in the more general figurative understanding it is the coexistence, unity, and interrelation of past, present, and future that is emphasized, instead of the linearity of time. According to Auerbach's definition, 'figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfils the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life' (1984: 53). In terms of typology, the types in the northern English context would be the Scandinavian narratives, and the antitype the Christian salvation story. The Scandinavian narratives, however, function as parallels rather than as prefigurations; thus the antitypes do not encompass or fulfil these types, but are 'illustrated' or enriched by them. As far as the temporal relation of the two poles is concerned, they are both located in historical time (according to the belief of the Viking-Age audience), but the temporal sequence is often ambiguous. For example, Christ's Crucifixion is clearly a past event, but whether the Ragnarök is yet to come or is part of the distant past is unclear. When compared to biblical typology, figurative thinking suggests an even more intertwined coexistence of past, present, and future where the past becomes a melting pot of culturally different narratives. In the process of religious accommodation the Christian salvation story becomes the core narrative and the other narratives participate in it by their shared patterns. This is a process of understanding and a method of explanation, but not biblical exegesis in the traditional sense.

Figurative thinking is based on the natural human desire to compare and relate new events, concepts, or phenomena to well-known things in order to understand them. The question has often been raised in connection with Viking-Age sculpture (especially the 'Fishing Stone', the Gosforth cross, the Nunburnholme cross, and the two Leeds crosses) whether the mixed iconography represents an attempt to reconcile the pagan and Christian traditions — that is, the parallels between the pagan and Christian stories are emphasized — or whether they represent a conscious opposition of the two traditions with the stories being juxtaposed and the superiority of Christianity emphasized. Following the logic of figurative thinking, the emphasis is on the recurrence of patterns, thus juxtaposition and parallels essentially fall into the same category, since they are both based on the fact that the stories or figures share certain characteristics or elements. Therefore, it makes little sense to try to determine whether, for example, on the 'Fishing Stone' (with a visual juxtaposition of Thor's fishing with the Christian hart-and-snake motif) the 'message' was to rule out the pagan tradition by showing a possible negative example (Thor and the serpent ultimately defeat each other), or whether they were seen as parallels. For the contemporary observer all stories formed part of one and the same 'system' or cultural reality, even though their different cultural origins were clearly recognized. The pagan mythological stories had gradually lost their mythological status, and they were no longer about gods who were actively venerated but about heroes of the distant mythical/semi-historical past. The relationship between these narratives of different cultural origin became like a dialogue where one story involved or referred to another by sharing elements that linked them.

Similarly to biblical typology, the elements shared between the stories and their characters vary greatly, and they suggest different levels of association. From the recurrence of simple objects to shared ethical concepts and narrative patterns, various elements can promote the interconnection of different narratives. The links can be created by similar characters (e.g. the Midgard serpent and Leviathan, both nautical monsters, the representations of evil), comparable roles in history (Vidar and Christ, the saviour sons of the chief god/God), shared narrative structures (fishing for the nautical monster, binding the monster of evil, or suffering self-sacrifice by being hung on a tree), recurring natural phenomena (the darkening of the sun or an earthquake taking place at the Crucifixion, the apocalypse, and Ragnarök), or general ethical concepts (the fight between good and evil). Due to the composite character of the Germanic gods, characteristics and episodes of the lives of several different mythological characters may be compared to Christ on various levels (Odin, Thor, Vidar), instead of there being a one-to-one correspondence between a particular god and Christ or any other biblical

Table 1. Norse mythological and heroic elements in Christian context:
a table of possible correspondences.

Mythological and heroic elements	Associated Christian material or Christian context	Correspondences
WAYAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [pre-Viking evidence: <i>Deor</i>: Christian conclusion (consolation); <i>Franks Casket</i>: Adoration of the Magi; wise craftsmen] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • craftsmanship (in particular of a smith) • wisdom • suffering and redemption
Wayland in his flying contrivance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • angels; eagle of St John(?) • Resurrection and Ascension(?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to fly; wings
SIGURD and the Völsung Legend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certain aspects of Genesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • serpent; act of eating illicitly and gaining knowledge; tree associated with knowledge
Sigurd the dragonslayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Michael and the Serpent of the Apocalypse [later also St George] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slaying a serpentine monster; victory over evil
Meal of Sigurd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eucharistic meal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • miracle of the blood; initiation where special knowledge is gained
THOR's encounter with the Midgard serpent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fishing for Leviathan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fishing for the nautical monster representing evil; confrontation of good and evil
[Thor's hammer, Mjöllnir]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [both cross- and hammer-shaped pendants worn as amulets] 	
MIDGARD SERPENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leviathan • Serpent of the Apocalypse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • serpentine (nautical) monster representing evil
Fettering of FENRIR by Tyr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satan bound / Bound Devil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evil bound by fetters but breaks free at the end of time
Odin's fight with Fenrir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apocalyptic encounter between good and monstrous evil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encounter of (main) god and the monster of evil
Odin's death by being devoured by Fenrir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jonah in the whale and its typological parallel in the Harrowing of Hell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • god swallowed by monster
The bound LOKI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satan bound / Bound Devil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evil bound by fetters but breaks free at the end of time
RAGNARÖK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • events of the Crucifixion • Apocalypse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • end of an era • overlap includes the association of both Vidar and Odin with Christ; the bound evil breaking free; fire and earthquake; Heimdall's horn and the trumpets of the Apocalypse; horsemen and the apocalyptic riders, etc. [Further links listed in the discussion of Ragnarök in Chapter 2.]
ODIN's self-sacrifice on Yggdrasil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ on the cross 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • god's self-sacrifice on a tree • pierced by spear • journey to another existence to acquire special knowledge/salvation for mankind
YGGDRASIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ's cross 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tree of life; cosmic tree • place of the god's self-sacrifice
VALKYRIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • death and reward in afterlife • Resurrection(?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the drink of death

character or saint. The table opposite, which summarizes the findings of Chapters 1, 2, and 3, provides an overview of the possible correspondences between the Christian lore and the mythological and heroic episodes and characters that are documented in Viking-Age sculpture of northern England (Table 1). Some parallels are explicitly manifested in the iconographical programmes of select monuments, while others are scholarly hypotheses or my deductions, admittedly bearing the risk of being speculative at times. Further proposed but less probable links have been discussed in connection with individual monuments in the chapters above.

In most cases the mere survival of an iconographical element of Scandinavian mythological or heroic origin (even without explicit Christian visual context) is in itself the indication that a legitimate pattern or link was found to integrate it in the newly encountered cultural tradition and display it on an essentially Christian monument (the hogbacks may be an exception here) in most cases at an ecclesiastical site. It is important to note, however, that we cannot exclude the possibility that some of the carvings that display only non-Christian iconography were created by artists and patrons only superficially aware of Christian teaching, yet immersed enough in the local culture to adopt the public art of stone sculpture.

The Structure of Time

The principle behind typological exegesis is that God has always had the same purpose in history and he is consistent in his plan of salvation manifested in the history of mankind. Typology is based upon a chronological sequence, a progress in history, where the type precedes the antitype, but at the same time it also disregards chronology and emphasizes the significance of conceptual links that connect different temporal layers. A number of high and late medieval works of art relying on the principle of typology display a triadic typological schema with two Old Testament types (the *ante legem* and *sub lege* types) for every New Testament (*sub gratia*) antitype.⁵ This creates an elaborate network

⁵ The most notable example is the Altar of Verdun in Klosterneuburg Abbey, Austria, a masterpiece of medieval enamelwork created by Nicholas of Verdun around 1180. In its present form the winged altar contains fifty-one labelled biblical scenes of champlevé work arranged in three horizontal rows and seventeen panels (vertical columns). The three images in each panel correspond to the triadic typological schema, pairing two Old Testament images with one scene from the New Testament (in the middle row).

of references between different epochs of history. But in spite of the fact that typology, as Christianity in general, is based on a teleological concept of history, as an interpretative method it only works backwards in time, that is, retrospectively. Typological 'proofs' are ineffective if they are read 'in the order of time' (i.e. type \rightarrow antitype); they can only be read 'in the order of knowledge' (i.e. antitype \rightarrow type). Similarly to typology, figurative thinking also promotes a 'multidimensional' understanding of time (as opposed to linear chronology). Since temporality is an important aspect of figurative thinking, the present discussion would not be complete without a brief survey of the medieval concept(s) of time.

The Middle Ages had no single view of time, but rather a number of competing notions inherited from various cultural traditions.⁶ Time was understood as a combination of three opposing yet coexisting temporal structures: cyclic time, linear time, and figurative time. From an everyday perspective the most natural perception of time is cyclic, determined by a number of different temporal cycles based on repetition and rhythm. The repetitive nature of cyclic time, however, does not exclude the possibility of variation and progression; therefore it is not to be understood as the exclusive opposite of the linear time concept (Adam 1994: 519). The cyclic view of time is based on the experience of past generations and is essentially past-oriented, since it is the past that is reflected, and repeated in an altered form, in the present and ultimately in the future.

The finite nature of individual human life also promotes another, a unidirectional and linear concept of time, with an emphasis on a distinct beginning and end. This linear concept of time projected onto the history of mankind is commonly understood to be the predominant Christian concept of time and history.⁷ Since history is the unfolding of God's plan of salvation, it is teleological and proceeds towards an end. The well-defined end and purpose of history makes it a future-oriented understanding of time, with events that cannot be repeated.

The future-orientation of linear time and the past-orientation of cyclic time are united in the third model, figurative time. It is based on the recognition of similarities and resemblance, the repetition of patterns, and has been promoted in a Christian cultural context by the tradition of figural interpretation. In the

⁶ The following summary of the concept of time in medieval culture is largely based on Higgins 1989. For further details also see Kopár 2010: 205–07.

⁷ It was St Augustine (in *De civitate Dei*, Book XII) who most vigorously articulated objections to the classical notion of recurrence and the Platonic ideas of eternal return, contrasting them to the 'straight path' of Christian time (Higgins 1989: 230–31).

figurative perception of time 'past and future are fused in the present of the figure, filling it with meaning, while the meaning of the figure itself is diffused throughout all time' (Higgins 1989: 248). Consequently, a unity of time is achieved through figures (*figurae*) and temporality is dissolved. The figurative relation between events separated by time becomes more important than their chronological relationship.

It is the lack of interest in chronology and the interrelatedness of past, present, and future that also characterizes the early medieval Scandinavian perception of time and history, which is probably reflective of a more widespread Germanic tradition.⁸ Similarly to the Christian Middle Ages, the perception of time in early medieval Scandinavia was also a combination of linear and cyclic structures. The linear aspect of mythic time can be detected in the succession of four distinctive periods in Norse mythology: (1) the mythical prehistory of creation; (2) the chronologically vague mythical present (with aspects of eternity in the unchanging nature and longevity of the gods); (3) the eschatological events of Ragnarök; and (4) the distant future of a new world (Simek 1993: 334). There is certainly some sense of temporal linearity reflected in this chronology, but unlike in Christian history, neither the sequence of creations nor the apocalypse is a terminal event in a temporal sense. Instead, the multiplicity of creation stories suggests some sense of repetition infused with the idea of renewal and return and points towards a cyclic temporal structure. This cyclic perception of time also underlies the Germanic view of history: while acknowledging change and progress, the emphasis is laid on recurrence and stability. Events and actions that were regularly repeated had more significance than the unique, and their heroes excelled by repeating the actions previously performed by others (Gurevich 1969: 49–50). The veneration of tradition entailed an orientation towards the past and ensured stability and continuity in the communities of the present. Participation in the past through acts in the present secured the way to the future, and at the same time connected the three temporal layers (past, present, and future) by repetition and recurrence.

The conversion to Christianity necessitated a gradual change in this perception of history. The euhemerized Norse gods left the realm of the mythical present and

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the concept of time in early Germanic cultures, see Kopár 2010. The study of the concept of time in Norse mythology is usually connected to the analysis of the structure of space in the mythic world. For discussions of the structure of the mythic world, its two spatial axes, and their relationship to time, see, among others, Meletinskij 1973 and 1974, Hastrup 1985: 50–69 and 1990, Schjødtt 1990, Clunies Ross 1994: 229–42; cf. also Bauschatz 1982: 119–54.

were integrated into the undefined temporal space of the past together with the semi-historical heroes of heroic legends. The wide and capacious notion of the past allowed for an easy integration of different traditions without any perceived conflicts in terms of chronology. The past, a storehouse of stories of outstanding individuals, became expanded and absorbed other stories and heroes through shared features (*figurae*). With the conversion the historical framework of the past (as well as the well-defined future) became the biblical history recorded in the scriptures, and the Norse gods found their way into this new historical framework through figurative patterns. By being integrated into history, the gods and heroes of the former, pre-Christian tradition acquired a new prestige and were not competing with the Christian God.

Narrative Representation in Sculpture

We now return to the sculptures that provide visual evidence for figurative thinking through their unique method of representation. Most mythological carvings relate to particular myths that were expected to be familiar to the contemporary audience. (It is in fact the lack of these narrative sources that hinder us in identifying some of the carvings, e.g. the Lowther hogbacks.) In spite of their obvious and necessary connections, the manifestations of these stories in words differed (and still differ) significantly from their visual representations in terms of reception. As opposed to verbal storytelling, which necessarily forces some degree of chronology on the story by being linear in time, visual narratives do not necessarily require linearity and allows for some freedom of reception for the observer. Both Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon art are characterized by the predominance of a non-linear structure of storytelling. On the Gotland picture stones and some Swedish rune stones, for example, stories are presented iconically, that is, a longer narrative is evoked by a single characteristic scene or a combination of several scenes in one image. The representations of different episodes as well as different stories are grouped in cause-and-effect relations or around particular characters, but not in chronological order. This type of representation characterizes, for example, many of the Manx carvings, the Heysham hogback, the Skipwith slab, and even the Gosforth cross to some extent. Of course, the physical nature of a cross-shaft necessarily imposes some linearity upon the visual narrative as opposed to the relatively unorganized surface of a picture stone, slab, or hogback, but the lack of panelling (e.g. on Kirby Hill 2, York Minster 34, Gosforth 1, Skipwith 1, Heysham 5, Lowther 4 and 5, Crowle 1, and Sockburn 21) allows for some freedom and variation of interpretation.

This freedom of interpretation is required when combining non-Christian (mythological and heroic) and Christian stories in the iconographical programme of a monument, or utilizing an iconographical representation of Scandinavian mythological or heroic origin in a Christian context on a Christian monument. It invites the observer to create his own reading of the images, to find connections between them, and to interpret the visual programme of the monument. This interpretative strategy often necessitates the reinterpretation of traditional iconography, as indicated by the Gosforth Crucifixion scene that shows a small but significant change of the traditional Crucifixion iconography by introducing a female figure proffering a drink. The female figure thus also becomes alienated from its original cultural and iconographical context and becomes the visual hinge between the two traditions. In a few other cases we witness the moment when an image is slowly detached from its original textual background and becomes associated with another narrative based on similarities between either the two narratives or their visual representations. The shared elements of the Wayland and Sigurd iconography and the images of 'valkyries' illustrate that case (see Chapter 1). In other cases, two associated narratives or concepts get blended and the one image unites the two texts or concepts, as in the case of Dearham 1, where the Christian cross with its tree-like features may also reference Yggdrasil the cosmic tree. This interpretative process requires an active observer who is not only knowledgeable about both pagan and Christian iconography but who is also willing to engage in the interpretative process. It is to these observers and the possible patrons of the sculptures, as well as to the functions of the monuments themselves, that we turn our attention in the last chapter.

PATRONS, CARVERS, AND OBSERVERS:
ON THE CONTEXT, FUNCTION,
PRODUCTION, AND RECEPTION OF
ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN SCULPTURE

The endeavour to understand the significance of Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture does not end with interpreting the images and iconographical programmes of the monuments. It is equally important to identify the people behind the stones, the communities and individuals by whom and for whom the monuments were created, and to understand the function and contemporary reception of the carvings discussed above. The search for patrons and artists in the early medieval period is a notoriously difficult task. Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture is no exception, especially because the social and political history of many of the production sites, as the northern areas of Viking settlement in England in general, are poorly documented for most of the period. Nonetheless, the questions of production, function, and reception of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture are particularly fascinating because of the shift from ecclesiastical to secular patronage in the Viking Age and the public nature of the monuments. The sculptures were created to make a statement, a public statement, and there were individuals who were willing to invest in this medium because they believed that they served their functions well.

This last chapter will explore the patrons, artists, and audience of the monuments and the functions they assigned to the carvings. In order to understand the circumstances of and motivation behind sculptural production, we need to look (even if only briefly) at the socio-political context of Anglo-

Scandinavian sculpture first: the nature and extent of the Scandinavian settlement, questions of ethnicity and identity, and the state of the Church and ecclesiastical organization. These are all part of the larger context that had an impact, directly or indirectly, on the development of sculptural production, from the choice of iconography to patronage and the places of production. Due to the complexity of the Scandinavian settlement in England, this cannot be done at great length here; the following survey can only serve as a brief overview rather than a detailed evaluation of the evidence and the array of scholarly opinions.

The Viking Invasion and Settlement of Northern England

The dating of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture often depends on a combination of stylistic features of Scandinavian origin and external evidence of the date of Viking settlement and political control in a given area. Sculptural production with a distinct Scandinavian taste and iconographical elements presupposes the presence of Scandinavian settlers or their direct influence on the communities where the monuments were created. The details of the settlement and the intensity of the Scandinavian presence, however, are shrouded in many questions to which a wide range of answers has been offered, based on rather limited evidence. The uncertainties are present at the most basic level: When did the Scandinavian settlers arrive, and in how many stages (or waves)? How many of them were involved in the migration and settlement, and from what social and ethnic groups? Where exactly did they settle and what was their relation to the local inhabitants? What was the impact of the Scandinavian settlement on existing social, political, economic, and ecclesiastical structures? Recent scholarship has taught us a great deal about the complexity of these issues, but a scholarly consensus regarding some of the questions listed above can only be formulated with difficulty. Some of the questions have been deemed ‘fundamentally unanswerable’ due to the lack of recoverable evidence (Hadley 2006: xv). Nonetheless, the combination of textual, onomastic, linguistic, archaeological, and art historical evidence available today allows us to outline as follows the main developments of the Viking invasion and settlement in the northern areas of England, that is, the geographical provenance of the carvings discussed above.

The first phase of Viking activity in the North (which predates the period of sculptural production in question) was characterized by occasional raids and plunders, directed, according to the testimony of written sources, mostly at monasteries and religious communities that were repositories of treasure without military defence. These sporadic raids had little direct influence on the Anglo-

Saxon population and were hardly seen as a general threat to England. The early raiders of the late eighth century probably came from Norway, but we can assume that Danes were also involved from the beginning. The majority of them returned to Scandinavia at the end of the campaigning season, but it is likely that 'as time passed, increasing numbers were prepared to stay away for more extended periods, perhaps even for good' (Keynes 1997: 51).

The first quarter of the ninth century appears to have been a relatively peaceful period, but the raids resumed again along the North Sea littoral in the 830s and in southern England in 835. The increasing social and political unrest in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms only contributed to the success of the raiders. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it was in the winter of 850–51 that the Vikings first wintered on English soil. This marked the beginning of intensive raids of large naval forces and led to the arrival of the 'great heathen army' in 865–66 under the leadership of Ivar the Boneless and Halfdan, sons of Ragnar Lothbrok. Having spent the winter in East Anglia, the army (or fractions thereof) attacked Northumbria in 866 and Mercia in 867, moved back to Northumbria in 868, and then returned to East Anglia via Mercia in 869.

The period between the capture of York by the Danish army in 866 and the final conquest of Northumbria by King Eadred in 954 was the most turbulent century in a political and military sense. In the northern areas the Scandinavian-English conflict was further complicated by power struggles between rival groups of Scandinavian leaders. The year 876 brought considerable changes in the nature of the Viking presence in northern England, which ultimately had an impact on artistic production: Halfdan, who had taken the kingdom of Northumbria the year before, started to share out land among his followers, and the systematic Scandinavian settlement of the North began. Only seven years later, in 883, the first Christian Danish king of York, Guthfrith, was elected (d. 895), followed by a series of shadowy rulers with Scandinavian names. The subsequent period, from the political expansion of Ragnald from Dublin and the end of the English rule in Bernicia to the death of Erik Bloodaxe in 954, was a period of struggle between Hiberno-Norse and English rulers for the control of York. The political instability continued even after the formal integration of Northumbria and York into the English kingdom in the second half of the tenth century.

The Viking settlement of the northern territories reflected an east-west division. The eastern parts, including most parts of Yorkshire, were dominated by the Danes from the mid-870s onwards. The colonization of the territories west of the Pennines was initiated by the expulsion of the Dublin Norsemen by the Irish in 902 and involved a variety of ethnic groups (both Scandinavian and Celtic). The general turmoil in the region in the second decade of the tenth century

suggests that a later invasion and settlement took place around that time in the wake of the expansion of the Norsemen. Since contemporary chroniclers were preoccupied primarily with the English expansion towards York, Viking activities in the west remained poorly documented.

By the middle of the tenth century, Northumbria achieved formal unity in ecclesiastical terms under the Archbishop of York and the community of St Cuthbert, and the Scandinavian settlement areas were gradually brought under English royal control. In 959 the formal political unity of the country was achieved by King Edgar. With the political integration of the northern areas into the English kingdom, the focus of historical documentation shifted to the South. The subsequent Danish conquest of England in the early eleventh century was a political issue between Christian kings, which marked a new phase in the English-Scandinavian relations and culminated in the Danish accession (of Cnut) to the English throne in 1016.

The assimilation and social integration of the Scandinavian settlers in the areas of the Danelaw continued in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries in both the North and the East, and it probably intensified in the remaining part of the Anglo-Saxon period, even though the amount of written evidence falls off and military and political activities become less telling about the actual process of settlement and integration. One might note, however, that even though the political unity of the country had been achieved by Edgar, a distinction between the Scandinavian and the English populations in terms of legislation and customs was maintained and legally acknowledged, as is demonstrated by the law codes of Edgar and Æthelred the Unready. The presence of iconographical elements of distinctly Scandinavian origin in the sculptural corpus surveyed above supports the idea of cultural diversity, but the utilization of these elements on Christian monuments is at the same time an indicator of integration, not only in artistic terms. Although the dating of the carvings is difficult, the production of monuments with pagan and heroic iconography seems to have ceased by the mid- to late eleventh century at the very latest, which may mark a major step in the development of a collective identity among the (by then ethnically heavily mixed) population of the northern Danelaw.

Questions of Ethnicity and Identity

In our study of cultural traditions and their interactions we often operate with traditionally ethnic terms (English, Danish, Norse, Irish, etc.). However, whether we can draw lines of ethnic division within the Scandinavian settlement areas

has frequently been called into question. Uncertainty surrounds both the possibility of a clear ethnic distinction between the native Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians, and also that of a further division between Danish and so-called Hiberno-Norse settlers. Ethnicity is a subjective and flexible construct, a perceived identity based on the belief in the unity and common characteristics of a community of people (after Patrick Amory in Trafford 2000: 19). The dynamic and situational nature of ethnic identity calls into question any direct correlation between ethnic groups and language, culture and religion, artefacts, and racial characteristics (Hadley 1997: 83), in particular in a period of cultural assimilation. Whether our retrospective distinction between the 'English', the 'Danes', or the 'Norsemen' was perceived the same way by the peoples involved will never be known, but sporadic references in contemporary sources do suggest certain distinctions among those peoples. In our search for differences (in religion, social organization, language, etc.) between the native population and the settlers in order to account for the cultural and social processes taking place in the Danelaw, we often fail to emphasize the similarities between these ethnic groups, which provided the basis for the relatively rapid integration and assimilation of the new settlers.

The differentiation between Danish and Hiberno-Norse among the Scandinavians poses special problems and requires an understanding of ethnicity based on cultural and religious terms. Contemporary documentary and material evidence does point towards some degree of ethnic differentiation in the initial settlement of the eastern and western areas of the Danelaw (based largely on the two directions of invasion of Britain), yet by no means should we see either of these groups of settlers as ethnically homogeneous. The Scandinavian settlers of the eastern Danelaw are generally understood to be Danes, while those of the western and north-western territories are usually labelled Hiberno-Norse. The latter term is problematic for two reasons. On the one hand, Norsemen (or Northmen) were not necessarily Norwegians but may have also entailed Danes and other Scandinavians. (In fact, the term is often used for Scandinavian invaders and settlers in general.) On the other hand, the ethnic situation of the territories in question was unusually colourful and complicated due to generations of interaction between the Irish, Scots, Welsh, English, and Scandinavians in the Irish Sea region. What distinguished the so-called Hiberno-Norse of the western territories from the Danes of the eastern Danelaw was mainly the cultural and social impact they were subjected to during their time in Ireland and the subsequent integration of Celtic elements in their culture. The Danish versus Hiberno-Norse division should therefore be understood in regional and cultural rather than in exclusively ethnic terms.

Differences in the ‘ethnicity’ of the population of the northern Danelaw were, however, noted and emphasized by contemporary annalists. Manuscript A of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recorded the following entry for the year 920:¹

[...] 7 hine geces þa to fæder 7 to hlaforde Scotta cyning 7 eall Scotta þeod, 7 Rægnald 7 Eadulfes suna 7 ealle þa þe on Norþhymbrum bugeaþ, ægþer ge Englisce ge Denisce ge Norþmen ge oþre, 7 eac Stræclædwæla cyning 7 ealle Stræclædwælas. (Bately 1986: 69)

[And then the king of Scots and all the people of Scots, and Ragnald, and the sons of Eadwulf and all who live in Northumbria, both English and Danish, Norsemen and others, and also the king of the Strathclyde Welsh and all the Strathclyde Welsh, chose him [Edward] as father and lord.] (trans. Whitelock 1961: 67–68)

How clear the difference between the various groups of Scandinavians (and other peoples) was is uncertain. It is interesting to note, however, that two decades later, in 942, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* indicates another difference among the Scandinavians, besides that of ‘ethnic’ origin, in the alliterative poem remembering the capture of the Five Boroughs:

[...] Dæne wæran ær
under Norðmannum nyde gebegde
on hæpenra hæfteclommum
lange þraða oþ hie alydde eft
for his weorþscipe wiggendra hleo,
afera Eadwardes, Eadmund cyning. (Bately 1986: 73)

[The Danes were previously subjected by force under the Norsemen, for a long time in bonds of captivity to the heathens, until the defender of warriors, the son of Edward, King Edmund, redeemed them, to his glory.] (trans. Whitelock 1961: 71)

The division made here, in the context of Olaf Cuaran (Sihticson)’s baptism at the court of Edmund, is between the Christian ‘Danes’ (presumably the Anglo-Danish population) and the heathen ‘Norsemen’ (the Hiberno-Norse inhabitants). The capture of the Five Boroughs is thus seen as an act of liberation of the ‘Danes’ from their subjection to the heathen ‘Norsemen’. Half a century earlier, Asser in his *Life of King Alfred* (893) described the Danish intruders as pagans and depicted the conflicts of the late ninth century as being between *Christiani* (the English) and *pagani* (the Danes). Charters issued by King Æthelstan (924–39) also refer to the Scandinavian settlers of the East Midlands and the Peak

¹ Subsequently changed to 923 and later to 924 in the manuscript (Bately 1986: 69).

District as 'pagans', and the usage continues in charters of the mid-tenth century referring to inhabitants of northern England (Hadley 2006: 224). A distinction between Anglo-Saxons (south of the Humber), Northumbrians (both English and Anglo-Danish inhabitants of Northumbria), pagans, and Britons (of Strathclyde) appears in the charters of King Eadred (946–55) (Keynes 1997: 71), which indicates that religious affiliation was heavily mingled into the concept of ethnicity.² The association of the Norsemen (*Norþmen*) with paganism further supports the idea that the Danish-Norse division within the Scandinavian settlement areas should be seen only in part as an ethnic division, and it was perceived by the contemporaries increasingly as a cultural distinction. This also seems to suggest a longer prevalence of Scandinavian religious and cultural traditions in the north-western areas.

In terms of material evidence, archaeological investigations in the Danelaw territory have revealed some information about the distinctive artistic tradition and material culture of the Scandinavian settlers (versus those of the native population). Studies of leather-working, bone-working, and textile production at York have demonstrated the adoption of Scandinavian fashions and techniques by native craftsmen while retaining certain characteristic traditions of their own (Cameron and Mould 2004: 465), emphasizing contact and interaction between the two groups. It is primarily in surviving sculpture and metalwork that we find evidence of a prevailing Scandinavian taste. Jane Kershaw's recent study of Viking-Age brooches found in northern and eastern England has shown that female dress fittings decorated in Scandinavian styles were surprisingly popular and widespread in the ninth- and tenth-century Danelaw (2009). They may have been products of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian interaction or direct imports from the Scandinavian homelands. Their geographic distribution and longevity suggest that these dress fittings were worn to express Scandinavian cultural affiliation, which was perceived to be advantageous in ethnically, socially, and culturally mixed communities (Kershaw 2009: 320). Furthermore, the association of these brooches with female dress proposes that 'women in particular had a key role in promoting a Scandinavian colonial identity' (Kershaw 2009: 295). Given

² In the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury in his *History of the English Kings* (*Gesta Regum Anglorum*, Lib. II, §125) says about the reign of King Edward (899–924) that by his time the Northumbrians and the Danes 'had already grown into one nation' ('Northanhimbros qui cum Danis iam in unam gentem coaluerant', in Mynors, Thomson, and Winterbottom 1998: 196–97). It is interesting to note that, in contrast to contemporary evidence, historical memory must have pushed back the date of cultural integration, probably equating it with political integration and the establishment of the Danelaw.

the role of women in commemorative practices, the remembrance of the dead, and their status as bearers of cultural identity, it is not impossible that they may have also been involved as patrons in the creation of some of the stone monuments with Scandinavian-style elements. This, however, remains a hypothesis.

Viking influence on English art (as outlined in the Introduction) provides a further aspect of the Scandinavian-English cultural contacts in the Viking period. The art of the Scandinavian settlement areas (and in rare cases even beyond) shows the evolving sequence of Scandinavian art mirrored in England. This suggests some level of active contact of the Viking diaspora in England with the Scandinavian homeland throughout the Viking period. But as local adaptations and modifications of Scandinavian artistic elements indicate, the influence on insular art was an enrichment of artistic taste and a creative fusion of local and imported artistic traditions rather than an uncritical copying of Scandinavian artistic fashion. The new styles and iconographical elements introduced in stone sculpture not only revitalized sculptural production in the Viking period but indicate a deeper layer of cultural interaction and influence that goes beyond the fashion of styles and matters of form. It is this complex Scandinavian intellectual heritage, imported in the form of tales, myths, songs, as well as in visual representations, that came in contact with the Christian culture of the Anglo-Saxons and developed into the unique art and culture of the Anglo-Scandinavian communities. By the late eleventh century the cultural differences gradually disappeared and a more general 'English' identity developed (in the face of the Norman intrusion) in the northern territories as a result of the acculturation and conversion process.

On the Extent and Structure of the Scandinavian Settlement

The intensive Scandinavian impact on language, place-names, and art has often prompted a correlation with the scale of the Viking settlement. The issue has generated long scholarly disputes (for a comprehensive summary, see Abrams and Parsons 2004: 381–920), but in the light of the evidence available today, very little can be regarded as fact. Various hypotheses have been advanced to explain the intensity of Scandinavian influence in the northern and the eastern parts of England and its relation to the number of settlers. The variables include the size of the armies involved in the initial settlement and the possibility of a secondary peasant migration from Scandinavia. Historians of the first half of the twentieth century, notably Sir Frank Stenton and Eilert Ekwall, argued for a Scandinavian migration and settlement on a massive scale. It was Peter Sawyer's 1958 article that initiated the scholarly debate on the extent of the settlement,

challenging the views of 'traditionalist' historians and arguing for a small-scale migration. Kenneth Cameron accepted Sawyer's theory but argued for a secondary migration which resulted in a large number of settlers overall. The theories suggested range from the 'maximalist' to the 'minimalist' position, where maximalism is traditionally based on linguistic and toponymical evidence, while minimalism is promoted mainly by archaeologists and some historians (Trafford 2000: 21; also see Abrams and Parsons 2004: 384–85).³

The strong Scandinavian influence on place-names and field-names of the Danelaw territory had early been noted and utilized to explain the intensity and patterns of Viking settlement. The evidence has been surveyed in detail by a series of publications by Ekwall (1924), Cameron (1976; 1998), Watts (1988–89), and most extensively by Fellows-Jensen (1968; 1972; 1978; 1985; and many others). Place-names with Scandinavian linguistic elements have traditionally been divided into three major groups: (1) the so-called Grimston-hybrids, where an Old Norse and an Old English element are compounded (most frequently Old English *tun* combined with a Scandinavian personal name), (2) the *by*-names (Old Norse *by* meaning 'farmstead' or 'village'), and (3) the *thorp*-names (with Old Norse *thorp* for 'secondary settlement, an outlying farmstead or hamlet'). As far as the geographical distribution is concerned, the eastern parts of the Danelaw (eastern parts of Yorkshire and the Midlands, and East Anglia) show a large number of *thorp*-names and a considerably larger number of Grimston-hybrids than the west. In Yorkshire the endings *-by* and *-thorp* are only rarely combined with English personal names. The western areas, where the total number of Scandinavian place-names is smaller, have mostly *by*-names, and several names in the North-West show a greater degree of linguistic mixing (English, Norse, and Celtic) than elsewhere.

The once widely accepted evidence value of place-names with Scandinavian influence and their direct correlation to a temporal sequencing of settlement have recently been challenged on the basis of new archaeological and documentary evidence and as a result of modern methodological considerations (see Abrams and Parsons 2004). There are three major problems with place-names in general: (1) they rarely allow any exact and certain dating, (2) the circumstances of naming are often unknown, and (3) place-names do not necessarily reflect the ethnicity of the population of a given area. It is therefore highly problematic to make a simple connection between Scandinavian place-names and the stages and intensity of the Viking settlement, and land use.

³ Review articles and summaries of the development of the debate include Fellows-Jensen 1975, Wormald 1982, Hadley 1997, Keynes 1997, Trafford 2000, and Abrams and Parsons 2004.

Place-name evidence had previously been understood (primarily by Cameron and Fellows-Jensen) to reflect a hierarchy in the quality of the land (Grimston-hybrids above *by*-names above *thorp*-names), coupled with a chronology of settlement. *By*-names were believed to imply the colonization of previously unused land, suggesting an expansion of population between the late ninth century and the Norman Conquest. However, the availability of vacant land has recently been questioned and the continuity of pre-Viking settlement at sites with *by*-names has been suggested on the basis of pottery and metalwork finds (Abrams and Parsons 2004: 386–87). The renaming of these Anglo-Saxon settlements may thus indicate a disruption of the former system of landholding and the detachment of outlying dependencies of estates, rather than first-time colonization and expansion (Sawyer 1978: 7; Lund 2000: 132). Even if we accept a considerable expansion of the population in the mid-ninth to mid-eleventh centuries, it remains unclear whether the phenomenon was due to the arrival of new settlers or the result of local population growth and internal colonization, or both. Therefore, instead of suggesting a direct correlation between the frequency of ‘Scandinavian’ place-names and the density of colonization, we should accept the possibility that many of these place-names only provide evidence of Scandinavian influence on the language of the area, but not necessarily of the actual presence of ethnic Scandinavians in the given settlement. Consequently, place- and field-names can provide information about the area of Scandinavian influence (and often the interaction between natives and settlers), but it is less conclusive concerning the scale of Scandinavian settlement, its chronology, and the exact settlement areas. The Scandinavian influence is also evident in personal names, both in documentary records and in the context of place-names. How that reflects on the actual numbers of Norse speakers is, however, hard to tell. The extensive use of Scandinavian forms might have resulted simply from the growing prestige and fashion of Scandinavian names in mixed communities, but the extraordinary richness and variety of names and their particular forms suggest an active and productive speech culture creating and promoting names of Scandinavian origins well beyond the Anglo-Saxon period (see Parsons 2002).

By now it seems generally accepted that the invading armies were sizeable though not as large as formerly thought, and the subsequent settlement involved a significant number of immigrants.⁴ While there is evidence that the

⁴ For a bibliography, see Hadley 1997: 70–71, nn. 6–10. Alfred P. Smyth (1999: 4–11) also gives a detailed discussion of the size of the armies involved in the raids and conquest, but he favours the idea of large fleets and armies and emphasizes the cruelty of the invaders.

Scandinavian settlement of certain parts of the Danelaw was initiated by leaders of the Viking armies active in England in the 860s and 870s, no clear evidence can support the theory of a secondary peasant migration coming directly from Scandinavia. Whether the strong linguistic influence necessitates the assumption of such a migration (as suggested by Otto Jespersen, Henry Loyn, etc.) is highly questionable. While the intensity of linguistic and cultural influence may correlate with the sheer number of settlers, it is just as indicative of high social, political, and cultural prestige and of active social and cultural contact with the local population.

The surviving evidence suggests diversity in the process and nature of Scandinavian settlement in different parts of the Danelaw; therefore it is hard to paint a generalized picture. All we can conclude is that the new settlers did have an extensive influence on the native population, and over the centuries they occupied and politically controlled a large area (with various degrees of intensity), the settlement structures of which had been reorganized to some extent. Scandinavian culture did retain or develop a certain prestige in the settlement areas, but how long the social and ethnic identity of the Vikings was preserved is uncertain. It seems reasonable to assume that cultural and religious assimilation, as attested in sculptural evidence from the early tenth century onwards, indicates a mixing with the English population from early on, which led to the development of Anglo-Scandinavian communities with a collective identity.

Ecclesiastical Organization and the State of the Church

One of the most often discussed indicators of the intensity of Scandinavian political, economic, and cultural influence on the northern parts of England, and on the Danelaw in general, is the impact of the Vikings on the organization of the Church. It is particularly interesting in the context of sculptural production since stone sculpture originated as an ecclesiastical (primarily monastic) art form and, in spite of the changes in ecclesiastical organization, continued to thrive in the Viking period with increasing secular support. As far as the fate of the Church under the Vikings is concerned, opinions range from the heavy destruction of ecclesiastical communities and serious disruption⁵ to undisturbed continuity in several areas. Similar to, and parallel with, the diverse nature of Scandinavian

⁵ See, for example, Smyth: 'In late tenth-century England, there would not have been need for monastic reconstruction under St. Oswald had not the Danes wiped out monasticism — if not indeed organized Christianity altogether — throughout the Southern Danelaw' (1999: 35).

presence in different parts of the Danelaw, the relationship between the Church and the Viking raiders and later settlers shows some diversity both geographically and with respect to the various types of ecclesiastical communities.

Surviving written evidence often suggests that it was the religious communities that suffered most both in the first phase of Viking raids and in the subsequent period of settlement. King Alfred in his preface to St Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* famously reflected upon the overall decay of proper religious observance and learning in England, contrasting it with the riches of the 'golden age', 'before everything was ransacked and burned' (Keynes and Lapidge 1983: 125). This sentiment of dramatic devastation was echoed in some twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources that provided vivid details of the destruction of religious communities (see Barrow 2000: 155; Hadley 2006: 193–94). Even though these accounts should not always be taken at face value, monastic life and episcopal hierarchy certainly experienced disruptions in the areas subject to Viking raids (Blair 2005: 291–92). Several communities ceased to exist (with their members slaughtered or scattered) or were forced to leave their original houses (e.g. Whitby and Jarrow in the latter part of the ninth century and the Lindisfarne community in 875), the successions of bishops were often disrupted (e.g. at Whithorn, Leicester, Lindsey, Elmham, Dunwich), the treasures of churches were dispersed, and much ecclesiastical property passed into lay hands.⁶ The scarcity of surviving manuscripts and other documents from monastic libraries together with a general decline in the standards of literacy and knowledge of Latin are further indicators of disruptions of ecclesiastical life and resources, both material and intellectual (Blair 2005: 291; Hadley 2006: 208).

It would be false to think, however, that it was the Viking impact alone that led to significant changes in and deterioration of ecclesiastical life in England in the late ninth century and beyond. As John Blair (2005: 291) argued, there were longer-term political, social, and economic processes at play already from the mid-eighth century that put pressure on the English Church in terms of political and economic autonomy. Asser's remarks on the reasons for the decline in the enthusiasm for monastic life suggest that 'the quality of religious life in England

⁶ The exact cause and extent of land loss and redistribution of monastic landholdings is sometimes hard to judge since not only the Scandinavian settlers but also local lords, kings, and even bishops took liberty in diminishing ecclesiastical landholdings already from the age of King Alfred onwards (Blair 2005: 323–29; Hadley 2006: 209–10). The result was a gradual secularization of minsters, in the course of which 'not merely the estates but the minsters themselves were being more and more thoroughly absorbed into secular public life, as royal residences, land-management centres, fortresses, and towns' (Blair 2005: 324).

had been affected as much by negligence and complacency as by any systematic acts of plunder perpetrated by Viking armies' (Keynes 1997: 61). It is hardly surprising therefore that contemporary churchmen and rulers (Alcuin, Alfred, Æthelred, etc.) saw the destruction by the Vikings primarily as a consequence of the decline of the English Church, and not a reason for it.

Although the losses suffered by the Church in the Viking period were significant and the consequences far-reaching, the disruption did not necessarily result in total discontinuity of ecclesiastical communities and religious practices. There is (sometimes undoubtedly slim) evidence of continuity at major monastic sites (e.g. Lindisfarne, Wearmouth, Hexham), although on a much smaller scale than in the pre-Viking period.⁷ Many old minsters underwent a process of gradual secularization, which nonetheless kept a high proportion of them as functioning religious sites (Blair 2005: 295). The fact that some of the regular monasteries ceased functioning did not necessarily prevent continued existence of monastic churches as local churches with a community of priests. Religious life and rituals did indeed continue at many old minsters (Blair 2005: 293), and their communities of clergy were responsible for the pastoral care of an extended area (Richards 2000: 137). For smaller minsters we often lack documentation of continued existence, but the lack of charters and other written evidence is not automatically a sign of abandonment; at many of those sites we may assume low-level continuity, often with gradual secularization (Blair 2005: 294–95).⁸ A number of pre-Viking churches of northern England appear as parochial mother-churches in the later medieval period, which suggests some level of continuity throughout the Viking Age (Hadley 2006: 195), although some of these ancient locations may simply have been adopted later to build a new parish organization (Blair 2005: 298). The evidence of Viking-Age burials at several ecclesiastical sites also indicates continued use of their burial grounds. Of course, funerary evidence alone is not necessarily indicative of the survival of a religious community but rather of the continued appreciation of a high-status location and its sacred ground (Hadley

⁷ The migration of several relics from the northern territories to Wessex and western Mercia suggests that the ecclesiastical communities that served as the original owners and protectors of these relics were diminished or dissolved (Hadley 2006: 210–11), or they were at least portrayed as weak and unworthy in order to justify the transfer of relics to their new communities (Blair 2005: 353, n. 293).

⁸ For a map indicating the rate of survival of early ecclesiastical organization into the later period, see Blair 2005: 296, fig. 35. The map, based on documentary and material evidence, indicates a higher survival rate in the northern and western territories and minimal continuity in the eastern Danelaw.

2006: 206–07). Stone sculpture often provides invaluable evidence of the degree of continuity in areas where early charters have been lost (Blair 2005: 297). The survival of a large number of Anglo-Scandinavian stone monuments associated with ecclesiastical sites indicates that many churches not only remained in use throughout the period of Scandinavian settlement,⁹ but they were regarded as centres of devotion and commemoration, worthy of being endowed with works of art and serving as primary places of display of public monuments.

It is hardly possible to propose a general model to describe the Viking impact and the experiences of the ecclesiastical communities throughout the Danelaw. The difference in experience between the eastern and the western regions must have been significant, both because of the nature of the Scandinavian presence and ‘pressures which were not directly of the Vikings’ making’ (Blair 2005: 295). The North-West and the north midlands were areas of intense Scandinavian impact and at the same time of prolific Viking-Age sculptural production. Due to the lack of documentary records, much of our understanding of the state of the Church in this region comes from the sculptural evidence and the archaic structure of the later parochial system. In spite of times of political turbulence and the active presence of the Vikings, the area shows enough evidence of some level of continuity at older religious sites (Blair 2005: 308–11). Altogether circa 63 per cent of pre-Viking sculptural sites of the North-West also show signs of production in the Viking period (Blair 2005: 311), indicating institutional continuity and cultural productivity under increasingly secular patronage. In Cheshire and Lancashire sculptural evidence points to the reworking and survival of older ecclesiastical structures in a new economic context (Blair 2005: 310). The region of Westmorland and Cumberland was still stable and supportive enough in the 880s for the community of St Cuthbert to settle there. The Hiberno-Norse rulership after *c.* 910 resulted in a westward orientation towards the cultural traditions of the Irish Sea region, and sculptural and archaeological record and parochial evidence offer proof of continuity at several old religious sites (e.g. Whithorn, Carlisle, Dacre, Heversham). Looking towards the east, we see a similar level of continuity in sculptural production in Yorkshire: at least 60 per cent of the sites with pre-Viking sculpture also have ninth- to eleventh-century monuments, both at documented minsters (Lastingham, Kirkdale, Stonegrave) and at previously undocumented church sites (Kirkbymoorside, Hovingham, and Middleton) (Blair 2005: 314–15).¹⁰ At York, continued production of funerary sculpture,

⁹ For numerous examples, see Hart 1992: 30–33, Hadley 2000: 220–57.

¹⁰ All in all, there are considerably more post-900 sites in Yorkshire than early ones, and

some with strong Scandinavian influence, testifies for the unbroken significance of the minster as a religious centre under changing regimes. In Northumbria, the abrupt end of the 'golden age' after the Viking incursions made the devastation look more dramatic than elsewhere, especially from the perspective of the large monastic houses, the former bastions of learning and artistic production. Most ecclesiastical communities of Yorkshire and the areas of the North must have indeed experienced devastating changes after the Scandinavian raids, expansion, and settlement (especially *c.* 870–930), but 'enough remained for the basic fabric of ecclesiastical centres and cult sites to emerge in recognizable form, if modified and extended, in an era of reconstruction' (Blair 2005: 315). Sculptural evidence supports the impression of continued existence at several early minster sites (most notably Lindisfarne and Hexham, but also Jarrow, Wearmouth, Billingham, Hart, Auckland St Andrew, Ripon), even if on a smaller scale, and almost all sites with pre-Viking sculpture survived as functioning churches into the later medieval period (Blair 2005: 312). The Midlands show a strong east-west division in the rate of continuity and survival. The west Midlands, which largely escaped the expansion both of the Vikings and of the kings of Wessex, remained an 'abnormally stable region' with high survival of ecclesiastical centres and communities. The north-east Midlands and East Anglia, on the other hand, show a much lower degree of continuity (Blair 2005: 306 and fig. 35). While Bakewell (Derbyshire) presents an obvious case for sculptural continuity and Lincolnshire has a significant number of Viking-Age funerary sculptures, the area in general is poorly documented, and there is evidence both for continuity and for change in the region. Both East Anglia and the south-east Midlands have equally limited sculptural and charter evidence. Metalwork finds from East Anglia (Thor's hammers, valkyrie figurines) suggest possible practice of pagan worship among the Danes for some time, but no sculpture with pagan or heroic iconography survives (or was ever produced). Archaeological and documentary evidence points to disruption at larger minsters like Peterborough and Ely, but their communities were revived in the second half of the tenth century. The region experienced the proliferation of local churches in the late tenth and eleventh centuries, together with the survival of the cults of various local saints. This reinforces the impression of some level of continuity at local religious sites and 'the sense of a populous, polyfocal monastic culture, spanning the Viking interlude' (Blair 2005: 319). The overall picture emerging from the local studies is that of survival and continuity

only a minority of the sites has sculpture from both the earlier and the later periods. See maps of Lang 1991: figs 3 and 4; Lang 2001: figs 4 and 5; and Coatsworth 2008: figs 4 and 5.

rather than total disruption, although with considerable regional variations. But this continuity was dependent upon significant changes in most of the communities and was characterized by impoverishment, secularization, and adaptation to the new circumstances, political, social, and intellectual.

Several monastic landholdings passed into lay hands. Consequently, some of the older churches and their communities continued to exist under new rulers, often of Scandinavian origin, and were assigned new, increasingly public roles. The fragmentation of large estates during the Viking Age led to the impoverishment and gradual secularization of the pre-Viking minsters as well as to the establishment of rural parishes and proprietary churches in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries (Blair 2005: 323–29). The priests at the proprietary churches ministered baptisms and burials in the local community and probably kept daily contact with the parishioners. Some of the new churches of the Danelaw were founded by Scandinavian landholders who sought in them social status, support of territorial control, and a source of income. Evidence of the ‘privatization’ of former ecclesiastical sites and of attempts at continuity by lay support is provided by the inscription of the Kirkdale sundial in Eastern Yorkshire (no. 10A). It states that Orm, son of Gamal, bought the minster of St Gregory when it was ‘completely ruined’ and had it rebuilt from the foundations in 1055–65 (Lang 1991: 163–66). Later Scandinavian settlers may also have been active in establishing urban churches, some of which are dedicated to the Norwegian St Olaf (d. 1030) (Richards 2000: 138–41). In spite of the disruption in ecclesiastical organization, the Church remained a potent political force; adapting well to the changing constellations of power, ecclesiastics played an important role in the politics of Scandinavian York and the Danelaw (e.g. Archbishop Wulfhere, the Cuthbert community, Archbishops Wulfstan I and II).

To sum up, we can conclude that the Viking influence on the English Church of the Danelaw territories was twofold. Economic difficulties and organizational disruption led to a decline in the power and wealth of monastic communities, and also hindered the spread of the tenth-century Benedictine reform and cultural revival to the North. On the other hand, in consequence of the Scandinavian settlement (often on former ecclesiastical landholdings) a new system of proprietary churches emerged, and the late Viking period witnessed church foundations on a large scale. In spite of the impoverishment and secularization of a number of former ecclesiastical centres, local evidence points to some level of continuity and transformation rather than total disruption in most areas. The spiritual continuity of the northern Church can be seen in its success not only in surviving under the rule of (often) non-Christian Vikings, but also in converting both the Scandinavian rulers of York and the settlers in the rural areas

to Christianity. The social prestige and strong cultural presence of the Christian Church is also reflected in the continuity of sculptural production at several sites and the proliferation of stone sculpture in the Viking period. Although stone sculpture became an increasingly public art form, its association with Christianity and ecclesiastical art remained prevalent (evident in the iconography, form, function, and location of most of the monuments). On the other hand, sculpture also bears witness to the cultural and religious transformation of the society and points towards an increased lay involvement in ecclesiastical organization and artistic patronage.

Functions, Patrons, and Artists

In the pre-Viking period, stone sculpture was primarily an ecclesiastical art form, which largely determined its functions and audience. With the emergence of secular patronage in the Viking period the function of stone carving as public art underwent some changes. In the pre-Viking period, most stone monuments were architectural sculpture and carved crosses that presumably served as liturgical stations and/or markers of burial grounds and ecclesiastical sites. In northern England, there had also been a pre-Viking tradition of stone funerary sculpture that continued, even if in altered form, into the Viking period. Pre-Viking crosses and slabs did not necessarily mark individual burials (except for those of saints),¹¹ and they were usually associated with monastic sites. Many Viking-Age monuments, on the other hand, are believed to have commemorated the death (or possibly even marked the graves) of individuals of the local secular elite. The association of sculpture with individuals and communities beyond the ecclesiastical circles, such as political and military leaders of a warrior society and their followers, is evident from the presence of mythological-heroic and warrior iconography as well as Scandinavian artistic styles incorporated in monuments of ecclesiastical origin (e.g. crosses), amalgamating local commemorative practices with those of the Scandinavian homelands. The uniquely Anglo-Scandinavian hogbacks that are generally understood to be funerary or commemorative monuments represent a special development in this transformation process, although their origins have not yet been satisfactorily explained. The funerary nature of at least some of the Viking-Age monuments has been confirmed by carved stones marking burials found in situ at York. The continuation or adoption

¹¹ Funerary slabs (especially the so-called pillow stones) found at Lindisfarne and Whitby do suggest, however, that some individual graves were marked with carved stones.

in the Viking period of the local pre-Viking commemorative sculptural tradition is indicated by the rare occurrence of the characteristically pre-Viking '*becun* formula' (from Old English *becun* *after*, 'monument in memory of') on 'the most purely Scandinavian sculpture that survives in Lincolnshire', the cross shaft of Crowle (no. 1; Everson and Stocker 1999: 148–50) (Figure 23). The Old English commemorative formula, otherwise recorded on memorial stones of eighth- and ninth-century date, appears with the (dialectal or archaic) spelling *becun* carved in Old English runes (possibly even *licbecun* for 'gravestone, memorial stone'), but it is uniquely combined with Scandinavian artistic style and inscribed in a Norse manner on a curving rune band. The monument (discussed in detail in Chapter 1) is therefore clearly commemorative in function and offers a link between the local tradition of commemoration (through its Old English inscription) and a new secular Scandinavian context of production (through its iconography and style). Unlike later gravestones, Viking-Age memorial stones not only commemorated the deceased but were also (or perhaps even more importantly) memorials to the living, the patrons, whose choice of the art of commemoration was indicative of their cultural and religious affiliation and social status.¹²

A special group of commemorative or funerary sculpture, the hogbacks, has also been suggested by David Stocker (2000: 198–99) to have served as conversion monuments, with the facing bears at the two ends of the stones (notably at Brompton) representing the Church, alluding to the bear licking her cubs to life as a symbol of conversion. On these monuments the cubs are replaced by the lord's hall, indicated by the shape of the monument and the frequent appearance of a tile-like pattern on the top, which is to symbolize the newly converted family or individual. While it seems probable that the hogback, an exclusively insular type of monument, developed under the influence of Christianity and Christian art (cf. house-shaped shrines), it is unlikely that all hogbacks were meant to demonstrate the new faith of the deceased (or the living). In fact, many of the hogbacks lack the bear imagery and display pagan iconography in dominant places (see, for example, the myth of Týr on Sockburn 21 and Lythe 29, and the legend of the Völsungs on Heysham 5, although with end beasts, all discussed above). Therefore, a secular commemorative function seems to me more plausible.

In spite of the growing secularity and lay patronage of stone carvings, the involvement of the Church in the production of stone monuments did not cease. Stocker suggested the direct involvement of the Archbishop of York in the production of stone sculpture in Deira, which, with its mixed iconography,

¹² Cf. Sawyer 2000: 146–47 on a similar function of Viking-Age rune stones from Scandinavia.

represented 'a novel type of hybrid Christianity' that the Deiran church was apparently comfortable with. According to Stocker, the Archbishop and his subordinates were therefore largely responsible for defining the hybrid Christian culture of Deira, which found its visual expression in stone sculpture. He notes: 'Far from being provisional or transitional in character, these monuments could be seen as the mark of a new, self-confident Deiran nationalism' (Stocker 2000: 195–96). This statement is true for the erection of monuments as grave markers of the secular elite in Christian graveyards, but not necessarily for the mixed iconography displayed on some of them. The iconographical programmes of the carvings are by no means end products of an assimilation process, but mark medial steps thereof. The fact that the Church tolerated these pagan traits in mixed communities does not mean that they would have propagated them in the form of public art. Or if they did, the motivation was political. Nevertheless, ecclesiastical patronage of sculpture did continue in some form in the Viking period, as shown by the continuity of sculptural production at a number of earlier ecclesiastical sites, the survival of pre-Viking artistic elements and carving techniques associated with earlier workshops, and the overall Christian nature of the vast majority of the monuments. The secularization of the old minsters and the growing involvement of local aristocracies in ecclesiastical affairs may have resulted in a new orientation of the types of monuments promoted, reflecting the new, increasingly public functions of churches, in particular proprietary churches, and their changing roles as centres associated with local power. Commemorative monuments with elements of Scandinavian artistic taste and secular iconography could very well have been supported by secular clergy that were economically, socially, and politically tightly knit with their secular landowners.

The liturgical, devotional, and perhaps educational purpose of stone monuments is reflected in the possible function of stone crosses with elaborate iconography as 'preaching crosses' — a term used mostly for the monumental pre-Viking crosses of Ruthwell, Bewcastle, and Easby. People may have gathered at these large and elaborate crosses to participate in religious ceremonies and receive the holy sacraments. These communal ceremonies were likely to involve an element of preaching as well, for which the stone crosses provided an important visual backdrop. The preachers may have referred to individual images, especially if they were related to the reading of the day, or perhaps interpreted the whole monument in public.¹³ Alternatively, or in addition to this public use, the same

¹³ Éamonn Ó Carragáin (2005: 54–55) pointed to some practical difficulties in using the Ruthwell cross as a preaching tool. For example, would the preacher have walked around the monument (with his listeners) while elaborating on the images on various sides? Would he have

monuments may have also been the locus and object of private devotion and meditation, marking a special location, possibly consecrated ground, and providing visual stimuli. The best surviving Viking-Age monument of similar character is the Gosforth cross, which combines pagan images of the Ragnarök with a depiction of the Crucifixion, but the crosses of Halton, Nunburnholme, and Leeds and the Gosforth 'Fishing Stone' (in its larger original context) may have also been used in a similar way. The images on these monuments were arranged in an iconographical programme that certainly invited and required extensive interpretation, whether in public or in private, and it may have been utilized for instruction or meditation.

The custom of praying at high crosses and the involvement of the secular elite in the erection of these monuments already in the pre-Viking period is attested in the *Hodoeporicon of Saint Willibald*, written before 786 by the Anglo-Saxon nun Huneberc of Heidenheim. She relates how the parents of Willibald 'offered him up before the holy cross of our Lord and Saviour' when he was taken seriously ill as an infant, and 'this they did not in a church but at the foot of a cross, such as it [was] the custom for nobles and the wealthier men of the [Anglo-]Saxon people to have erected on some prominent spot in their estates, dedicated to our Lord and held in great reverence for the convenience of those who wish[ed] to pray daily before it' (trans. Talbot 1995: 146; DuBois 1999: 148). The custom probably continued throughout the Viking period in England and later in Scandinavia; references in the twelfth-century Icelandic Homily Book, in an early version of the *Jóns saga biskups*, as well as in the *Guðmundar saga* indicate that the prayer at outdoor crosses was pursued also in medieval Iceland (DuBois 1999: 152).

The unique group of Viking-Age sculpture with mythological, heroic, and secular iconography of Scandinavian origins may have fulfilled a number of different functions. The majority of them were probably memorial monuments for individuals (although not necessarily funerary monuments) or possibly for significant events, such as landtaking and settlement, church foundation, and conversion. Some of them may have been self-commemorative monuments, similarly to some Viking-Age Swedish rune stones (Sawyer 2000: 136–37), and others erected by male or female relatives or followers. Depictions of heroic legends (especially of Sigurd at Halton, York, Heysham, Kirby Hill, etc.) and a variety of warrior figures (at Sockburn, Middleton, Baldersby, Weston, Chester-le-Street, and many more) were probably used to commemorate an ancestor or

chanted the Latin and English *tituli* and then incorporated them in his preaching? Most importantly perhaps, the elaborate and unique iconographical programme of the monument would have 'cramped a preacher's style by over-determining his themes'.

an outstanding warrior, or simply to promote heroic lineage and values. Warrior images also give us an impression of the self-perception of the patrons as military and political leaders of an essentially heroic culture. Illustrations of the Wayland legend might have also commemorated a skilled individual or respected artisan through Wayland's interpretation as archetypal craftsman, although Christian interpretations of the figure of the smith cannot be excluded. Scandinavian-style artistic elements in general, both figural and decorative, were likely to be employed to make a statement of Scandinavian ancestry or affiliation.

Stone monuments in general could also function as markers of sacred places, Christian grounds, or graveyards. Graveyards marked by sculpture may have often preceded the building of proprietary churches (cf. Everson and Stocker 1999: 72). If there was no church yet, a cross might have been erected first as a place of worship at the site where later the church was to be built. In cemeteries the owner or donor of the land may have also been commemorated (or self-commemorated) by a cross. Similarly to pre-Viking monuments, most of the Viking-Age stone sculptures are associated with ecclesiastical sites, often providing the first piece of evidence of the presence of a church even before it is recorded in written sources. A number of the Anglo-Scandinavian monuments have also been associated with centres of local secular power. While some of these production sites (e.g. York) were major political and administrative centres already in the pre-Viking period and their continued significance is well documented, for others, like Gosforth, the presence of sculpture constitutes the only evidence. Political control over an area was of special significance, especially in turbulent times, and it was worth being publicly asserted by a monument that clearly displayed the cultural affiliation as well as the wealth and social status of the new ruler or local landowner.

The function of sculpted monuments necessarily evokes the question of patronage (again). As noted above, the decline of monasteries and the division of their lands into new landholdings resulted in the emergence of proprietary churches under the control of secular landowners who also became local patrons of art. Their motives and interests in subsidizing stone monuments varied. According to Dawn Hadley, the combination of Christian motifs and pagan Scandinavian ornaments and iconography, as well as the mixture of religious and secular scenes, represents

either the patronage of a Scandinavian lord trying to record his presence and to legitimate his authority by establishing links with the past and with native traditions; or it was the product of native patronage, by a lord seeking to express newly formed allegiances, and perhaps to understand something of the society of the newcomers; or perhaps it was encouraged by someone whose origins were less certain but who was aware that his existence was something to do with the arrival at an earlier date of Scandinavian settlers. (1997: 94)

This implies a high-status patronage of stone carvings and an association with the local rulers, even if on a small scale. The costly nature of sculptural production (including the acquiring and transportation of stones and the hiring of carvers and other craftsmen involved in the production) and the necessity of being in a position to publicly display a monument suggests that the patrons were almost certainly of the wealthier social elite, secular or ecclesiastical.

The production of a stone monument was a joint effort that required at least a patron or group of patrons who commissioned and financed the work and a stone carver who executed the design. More elaborate monuments (or larger workshops) may have involved a separate designer who planned the iconographical programme, a painter and/or a smith who added decorations, and a rune-master to execute runic inscriptions. We have very little information about the actual stone-carving craftsmen of Anglo-Scandinavian England. Similarly to most early medieval artists and craftsmen, they generally remained anonymous even in the case of commemorative monuments whose inscriptions occasionally recorded the names of patrons and/or persons to whom the monuments were dedicated. A famous exception to this rule is provided by the tenth-century Gaut's Cross of Michael on the Isle of Man (no. 101 (74)), which, in addition to recording the name of the patron (Maelbridge, son of Apakan the smith), proudly proclaims that 'Gautr made this [cross] and all in Man' (Spurkland 2005: 127–29; Page 1983: 136; also Kermode 1907: 149–53). The name Gautr also appears on another Manx cross in Andreas (no. 99 (73), also called Gaut's Cross) (Kermode 1907: 146–49). This latter Gautr, son of Bjarni of Coll, is likewise noted to be the maker of the cross, but whether it is the same carver or a different person is questionable. In the context of northern England, the only late ninth- or early tenth-century monument that contains the name of a carver (or patron?) is the cross-shaft of Alnmouth in Northumberland. The fragmentary inscription on side C records 'Myredah made me'. The monument is stylistically linked with Lindisfarne and shows no Scandinavian artistic influence, and the name is probably of Irish origin. (Cramp 1984: 161–62; Bailey 1996a: 105) Although their names do not survive, some carvers have been identified (by James Lang, Richard Bailey, and others) through their characteristic styles and methods of stone carving (e.g. the York Master and the Gosforth Master).

Evidence of the status of *sculptores* (stonecutters or stone carvers) in the Romanesque period suggests that they were primarily skilled workmen involved in building processes (thus associated with masons). They were skilled in the accurate cutting and decorating of stone (Dodwell 1987: 50–52). The same may have applied to the Viking-period carvers as well. Since many of the surviving Viking-Age monuments are associated with newly established or rebuilt churches,

it is possible that some of the craftsmen were involved in ongoing building projects as well as in sculptural production at the same site, if the monuments and the church are indeed contemporary. The carvers of Viking-Age monuments were certainly seen as skilled stonecutters and builder-craftsmen rather than sculptors in the classical sense or the makers of 'graven images' (*sculptile* in the Vulgate) in the biblical sense (with a negative connotation) (cf. Dodwell 1987: 58). Although not regarded as creative artists in the modern sense, they proved to be indispensable transmitters of culture and artistic innovators who transferred iconographical patterns from perishable media to the new medium of stone and adapted the art of stone carving to changing needs and circumstances.

It seems probable that the carvers of stone monuments were also skilled in other artistic media, most likely in wood, the primary material of house construction. The Old English word *grafere* (the native term for the later adopted Latin *sculptor*) brings together the activities of carving, chiselling, and engraving, carried out both in stone and in wood (Bailey 1996a: 106).¹⁴ Some of the finished stone monuments, though certainly not all, and more frequently in the South than in the northern areas, were themselves art works of mixed media: carved in stone, painted (and repainted), and decorated with metal, glass, and gemstone ornaments (Bailey 1980: 254). Decorated stone crosses probably served similar purposes as their wooden counterparts, and they may have resembled them closely in decoration and design. Iconographical patterns of Scandinavian origin are assumed to have entered the British Isles on objects in metalwork or perishable media (wood, bone, textile) or as mental images, and their transference to stone may have been facilitated by craftsmen skilled in different media.

As Richard Bailey (1980: 242–54) has convincingly demonstrated, carvers used grid systems and templates to plan out, multiply, and transfer iconographical patterns and designs. Templates or wooden models for stone carving continued to be used into the Gothic period (Dodwell 1987: 51). There are examples of freehand carvings too that demonstrate more innovative design. Some of them may have simply served as trial pieces, as the Skipwith slab (no. 1; Figure 32) possibly demonstrates. The level of artistic freedom that these skilled craftsmen enjoyed is hard to determine. Often they were working with established iconographical patterns but had some freedom in the details and the overall arrangement of the designs. The patrons certainly had a significant role in determining the overall iconographical programme that was in close correspondence with the function of the monu-

¹⁴ The term *grafere* is only attested twice in the Old English corpus, in both cases glossing Latin *sculptor*. (DOE (Cameron and others 1986–), s.v. 'grafere') The word is cognate with Old English *græf*, 'grave' as well as *græf*², 'sharp-pointed writing instrument, stylus' (DOE, s.v. 'græf¹', 'græf²').

ment. The relationship between patron and carver may have varied from place to place. At Gosforth, for example, two identifiable carvers seem to have worked for the same patron (with a strong interest in mythological imagery), while the York Master may have served a wider metropolitan community (Bailey 1996a: 108–09). There is also evidence for various types of patronage, secular and ecclesiastical, in the same region. In Ryedale (Yorkshire), for example, secular figural carvings and beast ornaments at Middleton and Kirkbymoorside suggest secular patrons favouring Scandinavian artistic styles. As for the carvers, the same two sculptors were employed at both sites, one of them also active at nearby Levisham. Less than fifteen kilometres away, a local workshop at Stonegrave produced carvings of a very different kind, with a strong link to the Irish Sea region and monastic sculpture, possibly promoted by ecclesiastical patronage and produced for a refounded religious house (Lang 1991: 41–42; Hadley 2006: 221–22).

Foote and Wilson (1974: 318) had suggested the possibility of itinerant craftsmen, especially stone carvers whose products were non-portable. Itinerant carvers could in theory easily move between related religious houses, split secular estates, and beyond, covering a large geographical area and potentially serving multiple patrons. However, the evidence of itinerant carvers in Viking-Age northern England is very limited, in contrast with the presence of peripatetic sculptors within the monastic network of pre-Viking Northumbria (Bailey 1996a: 109–10). Phil Sidebottom's study of the schools of sculptural production in the Midlands (1994) did not generally support the idea of itinerant carvers either, except in a few cases (e.g. Sandbach). Two northern exceptions in a Viking-Age context are a group of monuments in Allertonshire (Northern Yorkshire) and the carvings at Bromfield and Rockcliff in Cumbria, which do suggest itinerant carvers at work, according to Bailey (1996a: 110). While differences between metropolitan and rural settlement patterns may have also had an impact on the employment and sphere of activity of carvers, in general we can conclude that Viking-Age sculptural production was in most cases centred around regional and local workshops catering to their geographically immediate markets and communities.

Whatever the intentions of the individual patrons and craftsmen were, whether justification of power or the exploration or demonstration of origins, the cultural significance and evidence value of Viking-Age carvings with Scandinavian stylistic elements in general and with secular, heroic, and mythological iconography in particular lies in the fact that they are the products of culturally mixed communities.¹⁵

¹⁵ According to the testimony of Scandinavian-style dedication formulas on Manx stone carvings, many of the monuments were erected in the memory of relatives whose names often indicate intermarriage and intercultural influence.

They were motivated by an interest to bridge differences in culture and origin, and they reflect the intellectual consequences of everyday coexistence. The ability to relate the different traditions, the Scandinavian and the Christian Anglo-Saxon culture, and the need to do so suggest an acquaintance with both traditions to a degree which could only be characteristic of individuals or communities who have already taken steps in the process of cultural integration. If these carvings should at all be read as manifestations of cultural identity, then, instead of 'Englishness' or 'Scandinavianness', they represent that of an Anglo-Scandinavian community.

It is important to emphasize (again) that the specific group of carvings with mythological, heroic, and secular iconography (versus monuments with Scandinavian-style ornaments in general) is very small compared to the substantial corpus of surviving Viking-Age sculpture (around 5 per cent in the context of Yorkshire, see Introduction, note 13). However, the total number of these carvings (more than thirty mythological and heroic carvings discussed here plus a large number of warrior portraits) and their relatively wide geographical distribution (about twenty-five sites located across northern England; see Map 1) suggest that we are not dealing with a unique local phenomenon. The limited corpus is probably due to the combination of two main reasons: a low number of originals on the one hand, and a poor survival rate on the other. The production of such carvings was dependent (1) on a patron who under specific local circumstances found it advantageous and desirable to publicly display an affiliation with Scandinavian culture, and (2) on the availability of artists skilled in stone carving and at the same time familiar enough with mythological and heroic iconographical patterns to meaningfully transfer them to stone, often in the context of a new type of monument. These specific circumstances may have only been given at a limited number of locations, geographically confined (according to the surviving evidence) to the North and North-West of England. Furthermore, changes in local political, social, and cultural circumstances that originally provided a meaningful context for these monuments, their unorthodox iconography in an ecclesiastical environment, the diminishing number of people who could interpret them, and their sometimes mediocre craftsmanship may have resulted in a lower than average survival rate of these monuments. That is, they were more likely to be discarded or reused as building materials in post-Conquest or even post-medieval churches. Since a large number of Viking-Age carvings only survive as fragments, or partially concealed in an architectural context, we may assume that in their original form some other monuments might have also contained similar unorthodox iconography.

To sum up, the significance of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture in general lies in its direct relation to the changing social, political, and cultural landscape of

the Scandinavian settlement areas. The growing lay patronage of stone sculpture suggests a social and political statement through the sponsorship of public art. Monuments with images of mythological and heroic origin are especially interesting in this context. Beyond their original religious significance, myths also express social and cultural values and norms and can be adapted to changing needs even beyond the conversion (cf. Clunies Ross 1994: 15; Würth 2003: 228–31). The selection of mythological and heroic narratives that underlie the images on the monuments discussed in this study on the one hand reflects aspects of religious and cultural integration (the intellectual process of which has been outlined in the previous chapter) and, on the other, responds to political and social needs of the local communities. Rather than being the objects of pagan religious practices, the gods and heroes depicted provided various examples of social behaviour, both positive (Sigurd, Thor, Wayland) and negative (Loki), and thus facilitated the transmission of a social or ethical code through stories of mythological and heroic origin even after the conversion or in a Christian context. In addition, seizing the continued cultural prestige of these characters, local rulers claimed direct descent from the (increasingly historicized) Norse gods and heroes (Odin, Sigurd), and they found it important and advantageous to manifest it in art. Scandinavian stylistic features (both figural and decorative) also served as a statement of cultural heritage or the acceptance of a prestigious but received culture (or at least traits thereof). This may have had direct links with territorial ownership and possibly acquired further political and social overtones in the context of English-Scandinavian and northern-southern political conflicts.

Audience and Reception

The functions of Viking-Age stone monuments suggested above were based on a perception of the sculptures as public monuments and could be best defined as the 'social' functions of art. There is, however, another aspect of functionality that needs to be considered in connection with the reception of these monuments, particularly the iconography of the carvings discussed above. This aspect of functionality concerns the 'intellectual' function of the artefacts. It is this type of functionality that Pope Gregory the Great had in mind when he defined the role of visual art as 'books for the illiterate'. (See also Calverley (1899: 153) for reference to the Gosforth cross as a 'churchyard picture-Bible'.) If for Gregory books for the literate meant primarily a storehouse of codified knowledge and information (in the form of both primary and secondary texts), some of the carvings examined here are clearly more than visualized books or stories.

The iconic representation of both Christian and Scandinavian mythological or heroic subject matter was to activate a pre-existing knowledge of the narratives depicted. While the iconography of the carvings was necessarily based, at least to some extent, on traditional, 'codified' representations (more in the case of Christian subject matter and much less in the case of the mythological and heroic material), it allowed for some variation in the corresponding stories that they recalled in the minds of the observers. As we have seen above, the emphasis in some pagan narratives and the role and perception of certain characters shifted under the influence of Christianity (e.g. Wayland, Sigurd, valkyries, etc.). Similarities in the visual representation also invited cross-references between different narratives and in some cases may have even resulted in the mingling of the iconographies of different stories (cf. possible overlap between the Wayland and Sigurd stories).

The monastic environment of early sculptures defined a particular audience, well-versed in Christian culture and skilled in interpretative methods, that was not only familiar with Christian iconography, but was also capable of deciphering complicated iconographical programmes, as represented for example on the Ruthwell cross. The full understanding of these programmes required an active engagement of the observers in an act similar to the monastic practice of *ruminatio*, that is, prayerful reading, contemplating on, and interpreting of Christian texts (cf. Bailey 1996b: 26 and 2000: 20). Viking-Age monuments with an elaborate programme of mixed (Christian and non-Christian) iconography (e.g. the Gosforth cross, the 'Fishing Stone', the Halton cross, the two Leeds crosses) required a similar intellectual engagement from the observer. These carvings were intended to be illustrative and contemplative at the same time, and in that they remind us of riddles that are also both descriptive and contemplative. As 'visual riddles' the carvings inspired the observer to discover new meanings of well-known stories by putting them in a new light through allusions to Christianity, suggested by iconographical references in the visual context, the shape or type of the monument, or possibly its location. The reinterpretation of the familiar provided a way to deal with the unfamiliar at the encounter of different cultural traditions. Every single attempt to interpret the iconography of these monuments was a step on the path of religious and cultural integration, and it was enabled by a mental disposition to search for similarities and to find shared patterns.

A few generations later the knowledgeable audience was gone and the mythological and heroic iconographical elements gradually lost their meanings. The carvings ceased to fulfil their original functions. While their artistic merits and careful execution saved some of them from oblivion, several sculptured stone monuments were recycled as building material or architectural ornaments in

later churches, or simply discarded and forgotten about. The few pieces that did survive allow as valuable and unique access to the artistic taste and creative minds of the people of Viking-Age northern England and bear witness to the creative potentials of cultural and religious encounters.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The greatest difficulty of an interdisciplinary project is that one has to set limits and draw boundaries, which inevitably leaves some questions unexplored. The focus of the present study has been limited to a small and rather specific group of Viking-Age stone monuments from England with iconography of Scandinavian mythological and heroic origins. These carvings were probably created within a few generations after the settlement of the Vikings, the time frame of which varied regionally, and were produced in the northern and north-western parts of the Danelaw. When establishing the corpus of my study, I decided to take an all-inclusive approach and discuss or mention all monuments that had been suggested by previous scholars, justly or unjustly, to show the influence of mythological or heroic iconography. The interpretation of some of the carvings is undoubtedly problematic and uncertain, but these borderline cases are just as interesting as the core monuments of the corpus; they are indicative of the transmission, transformation, and adaptation of iconographical elements even if detached from the original context and narratives, and the contemporary audience may similarly have been puzzled by their unusual iconography. The monuments discussed in this book are indicators of cultural integration and religious accommodation. They are products of a Christian cultural context, but they presuppose and are indicative of communities that were familiar with the Scandinavian cultural tradition and were motivated to display it in public.

The sculptural corpus of the present study provides evidence of various kinds. First and foremost, it bears witness to intensive cultural contact and interaction between the Scandinavian settlers and the native population, as well as to the ability and willingness of the Scandinavian settlers to adapt to aspects of local culture. The large number of Anglo-Scandinavian stone monuments in general is indicative of the continuation, adaptation, and proliferation of an Anglo-

Saxon ecclesiastical art form that had scarcely been used in the Scandinavian homelands. The presence of mythological and heroic iconography also suggests the knowledge and circulation of specific myths and stories in both texts and images. Furthermore, they provide unique visual evidence for the processes of acculturation and religious conversion that are otherwise undocumented in many areas of Scandinavian settlement. However, since sculpture is not precisely datable, it cannot serve as evidence for the exact date and duration of the acculturation and conversion processes.

Although I have striven to present a comprehensive picture of this specific group of carvings from an interpretation of their iconography to their possible functions, both intellectual and social, several aspects of their production that would place this study in a wider cultural context have been left untreated. The present research could therefore be expanded in two ways: in geographical and in disciplinary terms. A systematic comparison of the Anglo-Scandinavian material with stone monuments erected in other regions and periods (such as Pictish stone carvings, stone monuments of Ireland and Wales, and Scandinavian rune stones and picture stones) has the potential to provide a more refined understanding of function, patronage, and cultural and artistic cross-currents. Furthermore, additional examples of continental and Scandinavian iconographical parallels (some of which have been mentioned above) may shed light on local variations in mythological narratives and the transmission of iconographical patterns. A study of metalwork would be particularly interesting since metalwork and coinage may have played an important part in the transmission process, along with wood and bone carvings and textile. Metalwork finds may also reveal new evidence for the popularity of 'pagan' iconographical traditions (as we have seen in the examples of figurines of valkyries and Thor's hammers from non-sculptural sites in England) and provide evidence for the widespread influence of Scandinavian artistic taste and styles in various media, not only in sculpture. The geographical distribution of specific iconographical patterns and places of sculptural production in general also merits further investigation; a study of sculptural sites in the light of landholding patterns and secular and ecclesiastical centres of power may shed further light on patronage and function. Last but not least, a detailed study of choices of Christian iconography on Anglo-Scandinavian monuments in comparison to the Irish Sea region and the South of England would reveal important aspects of the nature of Christian culture in northern England.

This book is not the first and by no means the last study on the fascinating carvings of Viking-Age England. Many mysteries may remain unsolved, but there is no doubt that further evaluation and contextualization of the material

discussed above will be rewarding and that new, interdisciplinary research on the Vikings in England will contribute to a better understanding of the cultural context of these monuments.

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